The future of electronic entertainment issue#96

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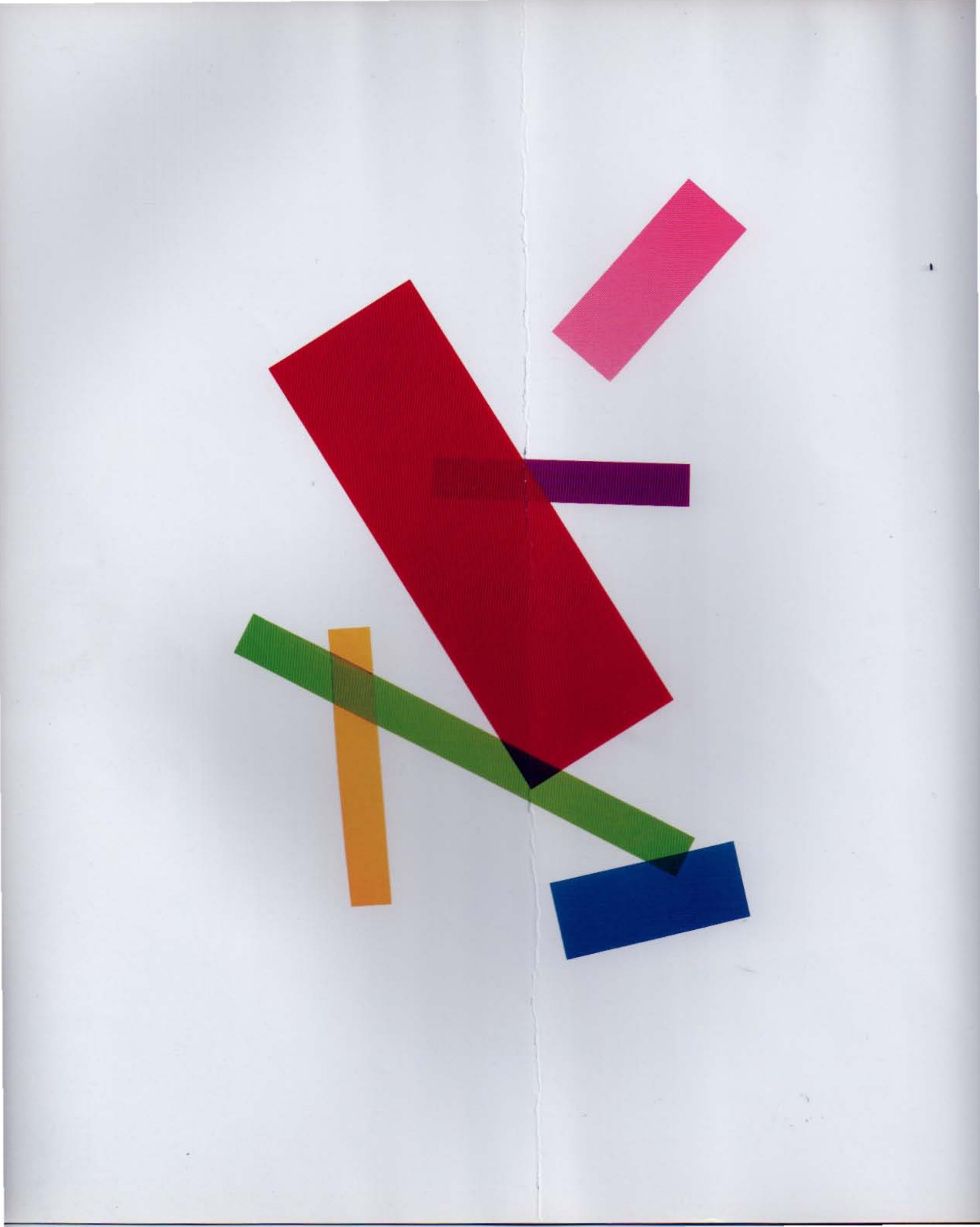
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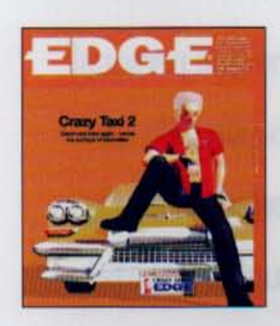
AOU in detail: Japan
new coin-ops unveile
Previewed: Hardy Gam
Headhunter, The Getal
Virtua Fighter 4, WRC2
Reviewed: Conker's
BFD, Black & White,
Wars: Starfighter, ZO
Plus: inside Treasure

Crazy Taxi 2

Dreamcast rides again – across the rooftops of Manhattan







Edge is as guilty as any entity in applauding the advances that technological developments bring to the world of electronic entertainment. And sometimes, when faced with a game such as this month's cover star, *Crazy Taxi 2* (see p38), and learning that its developer does not really give a fig about how it measures up to other games in terms of graphical achievements, pangs of guilt can be felt after so many years of championing more realistic and believable gaming environments. But, after enjoying *Tempest 3000* – a game almost as ethically pure as *Tetris* – last month, and hunkering down with such deep delights as *Black & White* this month, along with taking the first look at *Herdy Gerdy* (p44), truly the most sumptuous-looking PS2 title to date, it becomes clear that no particular approach is expressly right or wrong (or black or white, if you will).

Microsoft seems aware of this, too, as this month's XBox game feature (p60) attests, showcasing a number of typically console-esque excursions alongside a particularly complex type of game more traditionally suited to PC gamers.

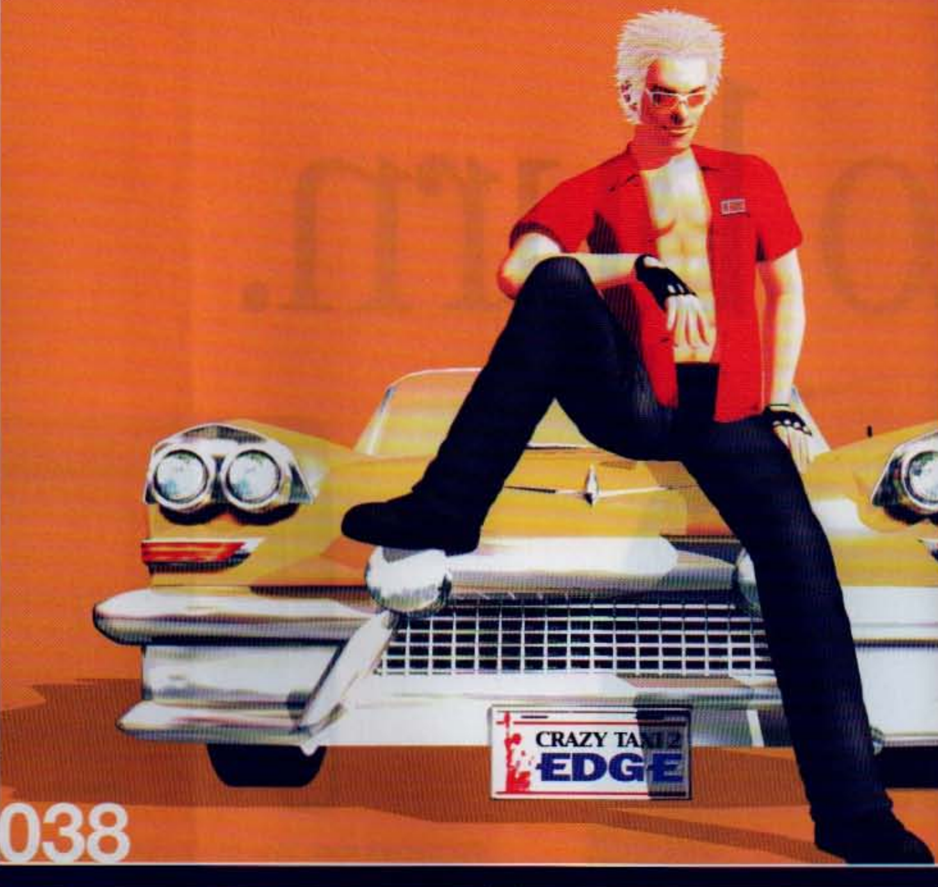
As more and more developers, from every corner of the world, graduate towards Microsoft's platform – in order to avoid Sega's forthcoming assault on PS2 or because they are simply not welcome on Nintendo's forthcoming hardware (for reasons best known to NCL's chief) – it becomes clear that the typical console gamer will have to adapt to change.

Sega's online activities, especially with *Phantasy Star Online* (a game justly afforded a rude amount of column inches this month), prove that closed-box gamers are willing to indulge in non-native gaming experiences – provided they are delivered in a comprehensible and manageable fashion. The company's experimental *PSO* has set a precedent which Sony could now conceivably run with. As the latter's online focus remains firmly pitched towards the broadband space, however, it will remain some time before PS2 owners get to sample a feature that will forever typify the appeal of a console that has in some respects already been ceremonially dispatched to videogaming heaven.



Features









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Thanks to Brian Baglow at Digital Bridges

"My name is Jim, but most people call me... Jim"

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Konami took its coin-op tech to new levels at the AOU event, offering to further 'catch your movement'

Konami and Sega dominant at AOU

Exhibitor attendance down at Japanese coin-op industry's annual showcase, but those putting in an appearance prove that the arcade space is still home to sheer e-entertainment innovation



The Japanese coin-op market continues to shrink in terms of active manufacturers. Capcom did not make an appearance at this year's AOU event, and the overall exhibitor number was down approximately five per cent on last year. Several companies stood out, however

Arcade manufacturers should now be devoting their attention towards the creation of physically interactive arcade experience. We have to respond to feedback and give our players what they want to ensure that there is a reason for them to leave their console at home for a while." So says **Andrew Muir**, product manager at Konami Amusement Europe, speaking after Japan's Amusement Operators Union 2001 show in February.

If ATEI (see **E**95) failed to hammer home Konami's vision for taking the coin-op industry forwards, then the Tokyo event cemented it, with every major player offering quirky new experiences with the influence very much on experimentation.

The most popular new attraction in these terms belonged to Konami, which debuted *Mocap Boxing*, a pugilism sim using similar technology to its *Para Para Paradise* and *Police 24/7* units (see **E**95), albeit with the addition of *Fighting Mania*-style 'gloves' which communicate with the cabinet in order to translate body movement to the screen.

With new Bemani titles also on show, Konami took the genre to what appears to be its conclusion, by allowing three cabinets – offering two guitars, two keyboards, and a drum kit – to be linked together to form a functioning band. Other manufacturers offered more extreme variations on the physical interaction theme (see p18), further proving that joystick-and-fire-button combos are far down the list in the quest for keeping the coin-op industry afloat, and, more importantly, forward-looking.

Sega storms in

Konami may have led the way in terms of interface innovation, but it was Sega, typically, which stole the show in terms of drawing an audience. Although the company did not introduce a playable cabinet, footage of *Virtua Fighter 4* (see p30), powered by Sega's Naomi 2 tech, allied with a preposterously oversubscribed presentation by company luminary Yu Suzuki, was enough to quell any doubts that the company's recent financial difficulties would have any significant effect in an e-entertainment space which it has called its own for so many years.







***Mocap Boxing*'s graphics aren't up there with Naomi 2 standards, but at the very least they convey the atmosphere of the ring. But it's all in the play mechanics...**



Indeed, word among certain company representatives suggested that Namco decided to postpone the unveiling of *Soul Calibur 2* until the JAMMA show later in the year purely because of the existence of Sega's rolling *Virtua Fighter 4* video.

In actuality, Sega and Namco, once the most conspicuous head-to-head combatants in the coin-op world, are now closer than ever, thanks to their collaborative work on Wow Entertainment's *Vampire Night*, the lightgun shooter powered by the *Pac-Man* creator's System 246 board (which is essentially inexpensive ROMs bolted on to PlayStation2 technology). The two companies' new-found partnership saw Suzuki-san dedicating several minutes' worth of his presentation quelling rumours of a possible *Virtua Fighter Vs Tekken* title. According to the man behind the likes of *Shenmue*, he has no interest in bringing together such "different" worlds.

In terms of Sega's experience with System 246, several Japanese industry insiders revealed that the company was, with the likes of Polyphony and Hideo Kojima's team at Konami's KCEJ West studio, one of the first developers to work with PlayStation2 technology, which clearly suggests that the company's multiplatform strategy was mapped out long before last November's new strategy unveiling.





Balls and dogs

Predictably, Sega's Amusement Vision presented *Virtua Striker 3*, a game no doubt destined to reach Dreamcast in the relatively new future, along with *Monkey Ball*, a title which owes a great deal to the seminal Atari game *Marble Madness* – and is clearly the better for it (see p18).

Wow Entertainment delivered less eccentric fare in the form of *Dynamic Golf* and *Major League Baseball* – but also the most distinctive game of the show in the form of *Inu no Sanpo* (translation: *Walking The Dog*), which requires gamers to amble on a treadmill as they – yes – take dogs for a walk (see p18).

Club Kart, previously on show at ATEI, proved another significant draw for Sega, although Sega Rosso and Hit Maker elected not to show their wares.



Virtua Striker 3 continued the series' popularity in Japan, while _Club Kart_ gave Naomi 2 a workout. _Vampire Night_ was a huge draw, as was the latest _Mr Driller_ from Namco (right)









Anticipation surrounding *Virtua Fighter 4*, and the attention afforded its director, Yu Suzuki (left), resulted in the most riotous scenes at this year's event (above)

Back to convention

Konami's slightly more conventional fare included the debut showing of *Silent Scope 3*, a sequel to one of its highest-earning arcade series outside of the Bemani genre. Needless to say, its popularity remained high for the show's duration.

Coin-op legend Taito had another quiet AOU event, with only one cabinet of note – *Stunt Typhoon* (another title already familiar to westerners thanks to ATEI). Though graphically no match for Sega's offerings, the title drew an audience lured by its handbrake functionality à la *GTI Club*.

But limited attractions such as this summed up what was, on the whole, another AOU show of change. Sega strengthened its domination further, while Capcom, once such a prolific manufacturer, did not even present a stand. A total of 54 exhibitors made the journey to Tokyo's Makuhari Messe, representing a 5.3 per cent drop in attendance from last year. This reflects the Japanese consumer videogame market, too: the spring Tokyo Game Show will play host to 45 companies, compared to 66 at the autumn event.

Konami's Muir believes building relationships with arcade-goers is the key to the arcade industry's survival: "No other coin-op manufacturer does as much for its players as Konami... We operate a player forum at our Web site and invite user feedback, which is actually sent to our R&D labs in Japan."

Further differentiation between consumer and coin-op, coupled with increased customer care, seem sensible policies in bringing arcades out of a deep rut.

Yu Suzuki dedicated several minutes' worth of his *Virtua Fighter 4* presentation quelling strong rumours of a collaborative Sega-Namco *Virtua Fighter Vs Tekken* title















Clockwise from top left: Capcom did not make it, but its *Gundam Vs Zion* did; Namco's *Mr Driller Great*; *Vampire Night*; more action from Namco's System 246-powered lightgun shooter; Wow Entertainment's *Dynamic Golf*; Taito's limited but action-packed *Stunt Typhoon*

Wireless and online the toast of Milia

Cannes conference proves an enormous success as a broad cross-section of the game industry congregates and takes the opportunity to discuss and plan for the ramifications of convergence

Once again Cannes provided a suitably elegant backdrop for representatives of the digital content industries to cogitate over future trends in technology and benefit from conceptual osmosis.

This year, the concepts that generated the most interest were the relatively embryonic wireless gaming and online gaming sectors. And once again the approach was resolutely multimedia-centric, with mixed conclusions and speculative technologies readily apparent at every turn. But if previous years are anything to go by, the exhibition provided an excellent forum for rarefied and optimistic debate, which cynics might find easy to dismiss, but which will eventually filter down in more refined manner to inform creative fashions in the electronic entertainment industry. After all, it's not just the relaxed surroundings or the crowded bar at the Martinez Hotel that attract some of the key players in the videogame industry (albeit often in an unofficial capacity).

The exhibition provided an excellent forum for rarefied and optimistic debate, which cynics might find easy to dismiss, but which will eventually filter down to the industry

Network gaming

From content providers through network operators to hardware manufacturers, the wireless gaming sector was well represented. Undeterred by EA's John Riccitiello, who dismissed wireless gaming as "a hobby" in his keynote speech for the Think.Tank summit, specialist content developers were present in the shape of nGame, Digital Bridges, and In Fusio, and were joined by Motorola, Nokia, and Orange. There was also significant activity from more traditional companies, including Infogrames, which also announced *V-Rally* on the Palm platform, and Sony, which announced a partnership with Vodafone as a European counterpart for its relationship with NTT DoCoMo. But despite the bullish optimism of the new entrants, manifesting itself in each one claiming to have the content or the technology that will unlock the wireless gaming market, there was little on offer to demonstrate that the sector is about to leave its current phase of experimentation with revenue models and game designs in advance of newer technologies.

Online gaming was equally discussed, if not quite as well represented, but again, there were conflicting opinions on the show floor as to how profitable or important a sector it will be. Riccitiello was certainly sanguine in his keynote speech, entitled 'Building an Online Gamesite for Europe', predicting that by 2004 two or three companies would be generating $5bn (£3.4m) of online game revenue. Elsewhere, Bruno Bonnell of Infogrames was less enthusiastic, and several attendees seemed to have conflicting opinions regarding, for example, exactly how much money is being made right now by successful franchises such as *EverQuest*. The most disappointing thing from **Edge**'s point of view is that while all of the debate surrounding the future of online gaming was informed with statistics and more statistics, generated by a seemingly unending roster of experts, there was little discussion concerning the game designs that are going to extend online gaming beyond the hardcore *EverQuest* demographic or the super-massmarket audience. The closest that anyone came was Riccitiello, when he argued that "deeply immersive, rich content experiences" will characterise the next phase of online gaming before demonstrating the curio *Majestic*, which combined elements of Nokia's *Game*, and an interactive movie.

SCEE's Phil Harrison hinted that big things can be expected of Sony at E3

Console and PC gaming

Of course, companies such as Freeloader.com, Terraplay and Blender, along with a wide rafe of webcasting, digital distribution, and interactive TV companies were present, and a great deal more comfortable than they might be at more strictly videogame related exhibitions, but there was also a strong showing from more traditional developers. The largest contingent in an official capacity was, predictably, French with Cryo, Kalisto, Microids, Monte Cristo, and Infogrames joined by the likes of Midas and Digital Creations, though unofficially the Independent Games Developers Trade Association, which is quickly gathering critical mass in this country, met on a yacht nearby. Undeterred by an article questioning the quality of the French development community in the trade press, Infogrames in particular was keen to put on an impressive display, with its stand occupied by scantily clad dancing girls and an impressively loud PA system, while a press conference pointed to the possibility of further acquisitions. Not everything went the charismatic Bonnell's way, though, with a significant turnout at the Martinez bar to watch Arsenal beat the Infogrames-sponsored Lyon.

The most popular stand by far was Sony's PlayStation2 booth. **Edge** took the opportunity to talk to SCEE's **Chris Deering** and **Phil Harrison** to discuss the company's much-vaunted broadband strategy and the Vodafone announcement. "There's two aspects to our connectivity strategy," explains Harrison. "One is broadband and the other is mobile. I think that particularly in Europe, where you've got a leading-edge mobile phone market and 3G or 2.5G arriving over the next 12 months, it's going to deliver some really interesting game design opportunities. I can't go into too much detail, but we've got some interesting things up our sleeves with this. We've already started trials in Japan of broadband delivery of content; we will be announcing



Wireless gaming was all the rage at this year's event, which featured several debates and boasted the presence of key manufacturers, developers and service providers, like Nokia



Acclaim was one of several traditional game developers, with the vast majority from France – Infogrames seemed to garner the most attention



trials in Europe and America shortly. So we're working hard behind the scenes."

Deering emphasises the need for a cautious approach, arguing that: "Before the full arrival of broadband there will be a lengthy period of evolution, and this is an issue for everyone in the business. PC owners are perhaps used to unpredictability and upgrading hardware, but we will have to be very careful or we could undermine one of the strongest reasons for console success. We're not holding back on the ideas we have, but what we want to be very deliberate about is that when they're operative there is a benefit that can be described to the consumer, or there's a danger they'll be disappointed."

Turning to the future, and particularly E3, Harrison remained bullish. "I think there are going to be three or four games at E3 that really raise some eyebrows. I don't want to give too much away, but there's a new game that has never been shown publicly before being developed in America, which I think will really amaze people. I think *Getaway*, *Dropship* and another game that hasn't been shown publicly that we're developing in Europe are really exciting." In keeping with the multimedia environment, he also pointed to the work that the company is doing with camera technology, highlighting the possibility of 'augmented reality' titles that combine video with digital graphics and incorporate image recognition.

Which highlights the fact that Milia 2001 provided an excellent medium for the cross-fertilisation of ideas about creativity and technology between otherwise disparate ends of the electronic entertainment spectrum, as well as providing an occasion for industry figures to meet in an unofficial capacity.



Digital Bridges was one of a number of wireless game developers which also included nGame and in-Fusio, but there was also a diverse range of opinions on the sector's future

It takes a Village...

In many ways the Game Developer Village at Milia was a microcosm of the larger exhibition. From WAP games to online games, from *The Snowboarding Detective* to *Animal Football*, there was an eclectic mix of genres and developers, who benefited from the opportunity to showcase their work.

"In many ways I think it outstrips the other avenues available to independent developers, especially the kinds of teams who we featured in the Village, most of whom would not even show up on the radar of the major games publishers," argues **Mike Gamble** of Microsoft, one of the sponsors of the event. "It gives them the opportunity to meet face to face with the guys acquiring product and teams in an environment where there is time to view and discuss their projects at length, not only leading to possible deals but perhaps more importantly giving them the chance to draw on the experience and advice of the assembled industry."

Certainly feedback from the developers themselves seems to be overwhelmingly positive about the opportunity that it provided. Gm2's **Ron Nanko**, for example, states that: "Milia 2001 – and especially the Game Developer Village itself – was a huge success for gm2. The possibility of showcasing our product, miniCan, to the professionals of the industry and thus getting in touch with important people and companies will certainly prove to be beneficial as far the future of our little company is concerned. Being a part of Milia 2001 emphasises the professional attitude we put into the development of our products. I can hardly imagine a better avenue than to showcase your product at an exhibition like Milia, as it's probably the best way to get yourself known and in contact with leading professional companies in this sector."

Similarly, **Jon Weinbren** of Imaginary Productions, whose *Snowboarding Detective* was on show at the event, is happy to sing the venue's praises: "It was great to feel pursued, and the feedback we got from almost everyone was really positive. So, in general, the Developer Village was great for us. I am still in the process of following up all the contacts we made with relevant publishers and seeing whether we can translate all the encouragement we got at the show to an early sign-up, but whatever happens, there's a great feeling here that we're now seriously on the map, very much part of the development community, and raring to go."



Lunar Cheese's **Nicolas Cazagou** points out the need to be proactive in pursuing publishers, but he too is pleased with the opportunity provided: "Meeting the publishers in person is important: the individual responsible for sending the demo CD to the publisher becomes real, and discussions can begin. In my opinion, nothing surpasses a meeting, which is why expos are indispensable as far as all developers are concerned."

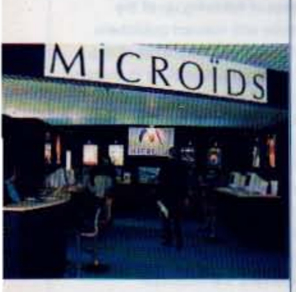
But the most refreshing element of the Village was 16-year-old programmer Jan Funke, whose *2D Deathmatch* hinted at great things for the future. However, if his spreadeagled form at the Techno Night is anything to go by, he still has much to learn.

industryopinion

Edge asks the industry for its take on Milia 2001







"Milia was great, not too big, and you can meet and have a chat with almost everybody who is important. It has great food and good weather, and if you have a bored moment you can wander about the basement in the dark, wondering how they get money to make the multimedia stuff and why anybody would want to make it in the first place."
Jason Kingsley
Rebellion

"If you want to go and see the latest titles being released then Milia is not the place for you, though the Developer Village had some extremely interesting products this year. It is a place for meeting people and people being prepared to meet you, unlike other shows. You can close the deal you've been working on for months, or meet people who are there specifically to look for a company like yours, no matter what part of the industry you're in. Milia allows people time to meet and discuss things at length, and standing on a yacht in the South of France in February definitely helps. The show should actually be renamed The Martinez – if this is not the place where all of the deals get done, then it certainly sums up the networking ethos of the show. From platform evangelists through to development directors, journalists and marketing managers, everyone is there after the show."
Ben Wibberley
Babel Media

"For Techland, Milia has been the first stepping stone to placing one or more of our titles with a major publisher. This year has proven to be no exception. We demo'd *Chrome* to most of the key publishers, and negotiations over the next few months are going to be frantic with so many suitors. In general, Milia is a strange exhibition. With many of the major publishers without a stand, or with a low-key presence, there is not as much hype as other events. Milia is an event where new content and people are king. Multimedia was very much the key this year as it is every year. People have talked about convergence for a few years, and this is slowly happening. Brands like Sierra and Blizzard were shown next to their sister products from Knowledge Adventure. Rather than just talk about convergence, it is really happening, and will have a dramatic influence on the games we will be playing in the coming years."
Andrew Beard
Techland

"I used to think Milia was a waste of time because it lacked identity and focus – it did not know if it was a telecom show, a games show, or an Internet show. Now I think because of the increasing convergence of all these technologies it has become a much more relevant event. This year it was populated by a number of very interesting companies – some, like Freeloader, which are pioneering games on the Internet, but just as many who are taking games onto mobile devices and interactive television. Milia has now definitely found its place."
Julian Perry
Freeloader.com

"This year's Milia conference was the first for Terraplay and we will be coming back as exhibitors next year. As the Terraplay System addresses both game developers/publishers and telecom operators/game service providers, a trade show where we can meet both is ideal. We are convinced that content has to meet and marry access in order to make online and interactive entertainment a profitable success. We had many fruitful meetings with representatives from both the content and the access side. It is our firm belief that both the game developing/publishing industry and the operator/service provider industry will need an infrastructure standard for online gaming in order to enable cost-efficient development and delivery of quality content to the massmarket. Many other trade shows are directed at only one of the industries, which means that you usually are not able to make those two industries meet. Others have a strong consumer focus, whereas Milia was very business oriented."
Bengt Lilliequist
Terraplay

"I think the show as usual was a great success both as an event and from a personal viewpoint. Milia is a very strange beast – the format is so unlike the rest of the trade shows (E3, ECTS, etc) that direct comparisons are almost impossible. Where else would you get game publishers, developers, broadband providers, and tools companies with their stands shoulder to shoulder? I think the real secret of Milia's value lies in that all the decision makers attend and have time to really sit down and talk either during show hours or in the bars afterwards. It's a real melting pot for the European industry."
Mike Gamble
Microsoft

"For Digital Bridges, Milia was a great success. Wireless gaming is going to be the next big area for the games industry, no matter what the cynics say. It also seemed that everyone was upbeat for a change and was having a great time with current business as well as looking forward to the future. Milia reflects what is actually happening in the real world. There are more and more channels out there where games are appearing. Concentrating only on consoles is like burying your head in the sand and if you don't start looking at the other mediums out there, you're going to be left behind. Milia is always a much more laid-back affair than any of the other shows, and the more open approach encourages new players to attend and that has to be a good thing. Plus, it has a way cool beach."
Darryl Williams
Digital Bridges

"My impression of this year's show was that the emphasis on the new media, interactive TV, broadband, and future mobile phone technology made for a more buoyant exhibition. Furthermore, the show appeared to us to have more delegates and more of a buzz than last year. The overall message coming across is that with consumers having more platform choices, good quality content will be an even stronger differentiator than ever – which means that pure, focused content providers such as Warthog will be even more in demand. Even though E3 is still the place to go if you want to meet everyone all at once, Cannes is unique compared to any other trade show. Not only is it one of the most attractive locations, but because visitors are accommodated within a relatively small area it is possible for one to see most of the people attending the show during the course of an evening tour of hotels and restaurants. Overall it is a great (and very pleasant) way to meet and socialise with fellow developers, press, publishers, and all and sundry connected with our industry."
Eric Elms
Warthog

"Milia has been like a moving target over the years. A few years ago it was a CD-ROM multimedia show, and then it developed more into Web authoring and things like that. Games have always been a steady element, but this year it's all about interactive TV, and broadband and mobile Internet. But for us there are two reasons to attend. One is that we are supporting our French company, because this is a very important show for them in terms of dealing with the trade and press, and it's a good opportunity for us to meet the retailers that we wouldn't normally see other than at ECTS. And for me it's interesting to see these other technologies and businesses. We've had a lot of 'convergence' meetings with companies that aren't in our space but are beginning to overlap with what we're doing."
Phil Harrison
SCEE

Sony focuses on networking

Annual PlayStation summit looks to maintain PSone viability, reviews the state of play in PlayStation2 connectivity, and considers anti-piracy plans

Somewhat ironically, given Sega's decision to cease manufacturing the network-ready Dreamcast, Sony's annual PlayStation conference focused on the company's own networking strategy, as well as the maintenance of the overall PlayStation brand to ensure the continued success of PSone. Apart from the announcement that the manufacture of PlayStation2 chips will have switched over from 0.25 microns to 0.18 microns by October to increase stability, the major thrust of the presentation concerned the company's partnership with NTT DoCoMo and its plans for data protection when the console gets online.

Details about the link-up with NTT concentrated on two products, which are more multimedia than strictly gaming products. Check-i TV is a product for PlayStation2, which will enable users to get involved with TV programmes generated on a daily basis by SCEI. Docodemo iMode, meanwhile, is a system for PSone that will facilitate emailing and the management of phone books with the help of a virtual assistant, Toro the Cat.

Turning to plans for the PlayStation2's network strategy, Sony announced that the hard drive add-on will arrive in July in Japan, and will boast 40Gb, but – perhaps alarmingly for publishers and developers that are hoping to make use of the device – there are still no details regarding the unit's price. Also announced was an enhanced unit, based around the core PlayStation2 CPU with additional memory and visual memory, to be rolled out in a series of 'PlayStation Cafés' at the end of 2001. Initially, the units will be introduced into Sega's Net@ locations, and will also benefit from a 15-inch TFT screen and keyboard and mouse.

The biggest announcement at the event, though, was undoubtedly the company's anti-piracy strategy, elucidated in advance of any firm details regarding broadband infrastructure or service offering. The Dynamic Network Authentication-System (DNA-S) proposes to stamp out the use of counterfeit software by tagging all content with an ID code which will be automatically stored on the PlayStation2's hard drive or memory card. Any use of counterfeit products, be they games, DVDs, or audio CDs, will be automatically reported to SCEI when a network connection is established, and access consequently blocked. With each PS2 possessing its own unique ID code, the system also has the potential to be used to monitor consumer usage, though Sony would do well to consider a US court's ruling against Intel when it tried to implement a similar measure with its PIII chips.

Despite these snippets of information, uncertainties remain regarding the roll-out of network support for PlayStation2, particularly in the light of thirdparty USB modems available from March. It isn't clear, for example, whether these will be officially supported by Sony, or how the DNA-S concept will work if they aren't.

It could also be argued that the conference was fairly muted in terms of videogames, but it was pointed out that there are to be 557 PS2 titles available by the end of the year, and Sony was bullish about the continued success of PSone. Indeed, buoyed by the fact that the average PS2 owner is buying 3.2 PS2 games and 2.9 PSone titles a year, the company announced hardware sales estimates of 20 million for PSone and ten million for PS2. Certainly Sega's decision to produce software for both platforms will give it a significant fillip, but with the imminent arrival of GameCube, and XBox on the horizon, the paradox is that strong sales of low-price PSone software may hinder the smooth transition to PS2 pricing.







SCEI was keen to highlight the territorial dominance of the PlayStation brand, but the central thrust of the conference was the Dynamic Network Authentication-System to fight piracy





Toro the Cat (above) provides an attractive interface for i-Mode users to edit their phone books and agendas through their PlayStations in the forthcoming Dococdemo i-Mode











Check-i TV is a difficult concept to explain, but will enable users to get involved in the creation of daily broadcasts from SCEI – submitting movie reviews, for example

NVidia in good shape

GeForce3 unveiled to acclaim, revenues soaring, and Microsoft chips production right on schedule

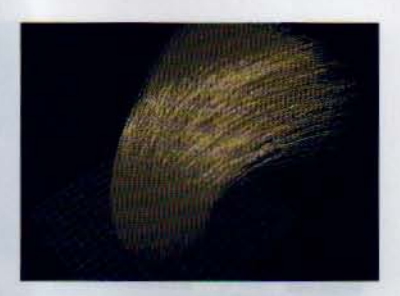


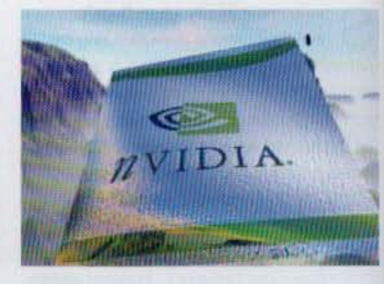
NVidia's GeForce3 chip will be optimised for AMD's Athlon and Intel's Pentium 4

Breaking with tradition, NVidia unveiled the latest in its line of graphics processing units at the Macworld Expo 2001, in Tokyo. Buoyed by the latest in a succession of impressive financial results, which saw the company's fourth quarter fiscal 2001 revenues shoot up by 70 per cent against the previous year to $218.2m (£148.9m), and net income up 113% to $31.1m (£21.2m), the company also announced that it has released its two XBox chips for fabrication.

The GeForce3, also announced for the PC after Macworld, boasts the same core technology as the XBox GPU, and benefits from NVidia's own development kit for DirectX 8 (see p115). The nfiniteFX engine at the heart of the chip provides hardware support for vertex and pixel shading, and also enables developers to create customised combinations of graphics operations. Surprisingly, the chip is optimised for both AMD's Athlon processors as well as Intel's forthcoming Pentium 4 chips and their NetBurst micro-architecture. Several OEMs will be utilising the forthcoming GPU, including Apple, Compaq, Dell and HP.

Id Software's **John Carmack**, who demonstrated a visually stunning demo of the *Doom III* engine running on MacOS X at Macworld, was characteristically enthusiastic about the chip: "The GeForce3 is fantastic. I haven't had such an impression of raising the performance bar since the Voodoo 2 came out, and there are a ton of new features for programmers to play with. Graphics programmers should run out and get one at the earliest possible time."





Technical demos show off the much-vaunted ability of the chip to accurately render hair, along with more advanced vertex and pixel shading than is possible with the GeForce2

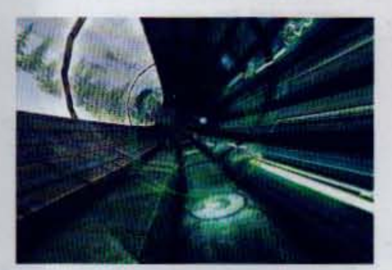
Prior to the Macworld expo, NVidia announced that its XBox GPU and Media Communications Processor are already set for manufacture, confounding Internet speculation that the launch of Microsoft's XBox would be hampered by the delayed production of the two chips. The Xbox GPU, a cut-down version of the GeForce3, boasts more than 60 million transistors, while the MCP provides 3D audio and network processing. They will both be manufactured at 0.15 microns.

"The GPU and MCP are key factors in the XBox experience," explains Microsoft's **Robbie Bach**. "With the XGPU and MCPX in fabrication, and the support from virtually every major developer and publisher in the world, we are absolutely on pace to deliver the world's most advanced gaming platform this fall. These processors will allow game creators and designers to make games shine in ways never before thought possible."

But as this issue went to press, Microsoft was still fending off rumours that its console will suffer from a delayed introduction into Japan. "We're proceeding with our scheduled introduction of fall 2001 for XBox and we envision no delay in that at this time," said a spokesman. It has also been suggested that the appearance of the console will undergo a more comprehensive makeover than just the size of its controllers when it is launched in Japan. With Bill Gates set to deliver the keynote speech at the Tokyo Game Show at the end of March it is likely that more details concerning Japanese developer support for the platform will emerge. Expect a full report next issue.















As well as the *Unreal Tournament* engine (above), some of the titles set to take advantage of the new chip's capabilities include (anti-clockwise from right) *Dronez*, *Incoming Forces*, *Independence War 3*, *Dinosaur Island*, *Ballistics*, and *Aquanox*. Developers working on these titles will be able to create their own customised range of graphical effects

Nintendo on the Advance

With 2.7 million GBA preorders and a rolling schedule of making a further million units available per month, the company is brimming with confidence





David Gosen of Nintendo Europe is keen to close the gap between worldwide release dates







Chu Chu Rocket should find a welcome home on the GBA, as should this incarnation of *Sonic*

There may not be any certainties in the videogame industry, but it is unlikely that Nintendo will be left with egg on its face when it comes to the imminent Japanese launch of the Game Boy Advance. If proof were needed of the company's confidence when it comes to the unit, it can be found in the fact that it is likely to launch without *Mario Kart Advance*, one of the most convincing titles yet announced. But a record number of preorders (2.7 million at the last count), and strong support from the development community suggest that the only problems that are likely to hinder the platform's inauguration will be getting hold of one.

To this end the company aims to have one million units ready for launch day, with a further million being made available for the second week, and a million per month after that to reflect demand. Such figures show that the company is unlikely to need Square's *Final Fantasy* series, currently tied to the more moderately successful WonderSwan Color, putting Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi's recent bullish remarks dismissing any future link-up between the two companies into a more comprehensible context.

Current software preorders put Nintendo in the number one spot, with Konami – a company that owes 50 per cent of its software sales over the past year to the Game Boy Color – in second place. Sega meanwhile will have only one title available at launch, though there are several more in development. The most notable features of *ChuChu Rocket* are its fourplayer link-up and 2,600 puzzle levels created by owners of the game's Dreamcast incarnation.

As the anticipation for Game Boy Advance continues to escalate among consumers and developers, **Edge** spoke to Nintendo of Europe's **David Gosen** to try to discover what the imminent arrival of the handheld and its next-gen brother, GameCube, will mean for PAL regions. Unfortunately, details of the European GameCube launch will have to wait until E3, and on the subject of the GBA release date Gosen reveals: "We cannot confirm any European launch titles or an exact date at this time, but we are still working towards a simultaneous launch with the US." This would indicate a July launch for Europe.

Which, for a while at least, leaves just Game Boy Color and N64 for Nintendo devotees to get their fix. But the news here isn't entirely good. Addressing the issue of release dates, Gosen says: "Although the titles for the UK do not need translation, we have a policy of launching games on a pan-European basis, and therefore they can be held up while the other versions are completed. However, we are always striving towards worldwide release dates and you will see this year that we have made massive inroads into minimising the difference in release dates worldwide."

Nevertheless, while THQ has picked up *Conker's Bad Fur Day* (p76) for UK release, gamers will have to wait until July for *Excitebike* (released in May last year in the US and currently available in PAL in Australia), and the second half of the year for *Kirby 64*, *Paper Mario*, *Mario Party 3*, and *Pokémon Stadium 2*.

GBA launch line-up

F-Zero
Napoleon
Kuru Kuru Kururin
Super Mario Advance
Silent Hill
Dracula (Castlevania)
PowerProKun Pocket 3
Konami WaiWai Racing Adventure
Golf Master
J-League Pocket
Monster Guardians
Mr Driller 2
Pinobee
Momotaro
Advance GTA
Battle Network Rockman EX
Zen Nihon GT
Tweety No Hearty Party
Yugio Dungeon Dice Monsters
Fire Prowrestling A
Dodgeball Fighters
Chu Chu Rocket
I'm An Airline Pilot





OUT THERE

REPORTAGE



Namco's *Photo Battle* sees players attempting to outsnap each other. What next? *Virtual Microscope*?



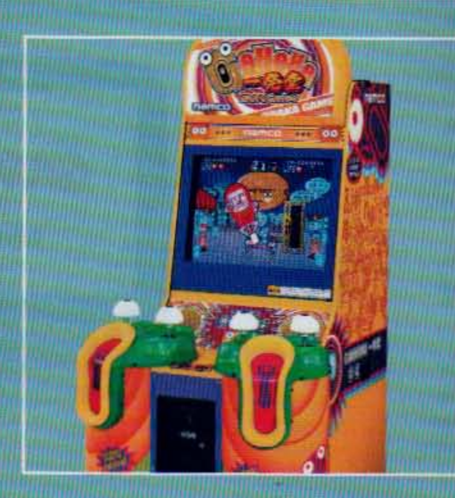
Konami's photo effort differed in that its camera is on a fixed mount. 'Take your best shot' indeed



Walking the dog, Sega style. Fortunately, the cabinet features banisters, so OAPs are welcome



It might not be Monkey Tennis, but it's the next best thing: *Monkey Ball*, a great twist on *Marble Madness*





Gahaha provided many of AOU's laughs thanks to its vast selection of innovative mini-games

01 Walking the wild side of AOU

Japan: As has been widely documented in this month's news, the AOU 2001 show threw up a intriguing slew of new gameplay concepts. Sega led the way with *Inu no Sanpo*, its dog-walking simulator, which features a treadmill mechanic built on a slight incline. Players first pick one of six dogs, ranging from a sturdy labrador to a lightweight poodle, then hold on to the cabinet's leash. Moving the tether from left to right moves the direction of your furry onscreen companion – an essential gameplay element considering the traffic intent on mowing it down. If you're still wondering how a gaming experience can really be made out of this, consider your dog's happiness meter, which must be kept high in order for play to continue. Walking your pooch over checkpoints brings bonuses (good things); allowing it to eat discarded food which litters the pavement gives it stomach ache (a very bad thing). Don't expect a UK release anytime soon.

Among other quirky delights were Konami and Namco going head to head with their virtual photography coin-ops; Amusement Vision's *Monkey Ball*; and Namco's *Gahaha*, which sees up to four players playing simultaneously via super-simple controls.

In all, then, it was a show of plenty for fans of the off-kilter.

Soundbytes

"The fact is that while many people will always buy magazines, the credibility of games Web sites has rocketed. Most magazines readers don't know and don't care that magazine content is often skewed by commercial pressure from computer companies. What they do know is that Web sites are fast, friendly and more consistently accurate"

If this issue of **Edge** is late on sale, it's because the editorial team spent an entire week rolling around laughing at this absolute corker from The Register's **Kieren McCarthy**

"We've hired cool people with cool attitudes, taken a cool approach to it, built a cool thing, we're working with cool partners to do cool stuff and we'll ultimately deliver a cool product. But you can't make something fundamentally uncool cool"

J Allard tells *The Seattle Times* all about cool

'Creating the XBox was like [Bill] Gates putting on a pair of hot pants'

Seattle Times reporter **Sharon Pian Chan** unwittingly brings to mind images of Alan Partridge dancing for a second series

"We're the Eminem of Microsoft"

J Allard again. Which would make Bill Gates the Val Doonican of the Seattle software giant, presumably

"Experiences like that make me realise that the space we're in is fundamentally a different place... it's Silicon Valley meets Hollywood"

Robbie Bach, chief XBox officer, comments on his lunch experience with The Rock

"The worst thing Infogrames has done is that whenever they take over a British company, they put French people in charge and that really pisses the British people off"

An anonymous industry figure discusses Anglo-French relations

02 Get it in the neck from Snake

Japan: Getting tagged in a videogame is about to take a novel twist. Konami's Japanese Web site is providing Solid Snake fans with the opportunity to become part of the *Metal Gear Solid* legacy. Personal details – name, age, blood type and nationality – are submitted to KCEJ, which will then transfer the information on to dog tags to be worn by the soldiers in *MGS2*. Those who want to risk a dart in the neck from Snake himself should consult www.konami-co.jp/kcej/products/mgs2/mgs2name/index_e.html.

03 Jet Set Willy rides again

UK: Jester Interactive has closed a deal for the exclusive rights to Software Projects' back catalogue – the move following hot on the heels of its acquisition of the Graftgold label. Those a little longer in the gaming tooth will instantly recognise the significance of the deal: *Uridium*, *Paradroid*, and *Jet Set Willy* are set for a 2001 makeover. While programmers Steve Turner and Andrew Braybrook may be on board to oversee the Graftgold conversions, regular readers of Out There may be disappointed to hear that Matthew Smith is unlikely to be the one to finally complete *Miner Willy Meets The Taxman* on a 128bit platform.

04 Duel-purpose Lego

UK: Student film directors frustrated by spiralling costs and the hassle of persuading friends to run around the local woods will be pleased to hear that a cheaper alternative to movie-making is to hit the market. The Lego and Steven Spielberg Movie Maker Set comes with 400 bricks, a USB camera, editing software, and character models including Fluffy the cat. Dialogue and sounds can also be captured to complement your dramatic creations. The kit is set to retail for £160 in April, and will be followed by expansion packs including backdrops and a set to promote the forthcoming 'Jurassic Park 3' movie.

05 Power up your wrist action

UK: A device which improves wrist strength should be a godsend for obsessive gamers. In reality, this strangely addictive device – which is set spinning with a rip cord and then accelerated with a circular wrist action – has the potential to keep you away from videogames for prolonged periods. A digital readout records the rotor speed which can reach upwards of 16,000rpm. The Powerball costs £25 from www.firebox.com.

Data Stream

Percentage increase in Dreamcast sales in the US compared to same period, January 2000: **52 per cent**

Storage capacity of Sony's PS2 hard drive to be released in Japan this July: **40Gb**

Number of companies attending Milia 2001: **791**

Number of journalists attending Milia 2001: **971**

Percentage increase in attendance at Milia compared to last year's event: **10 per cent**

Number of attendees at Milia 2001: **7,700**

Number of attendees expected at this year's E3 in May: **62,000**

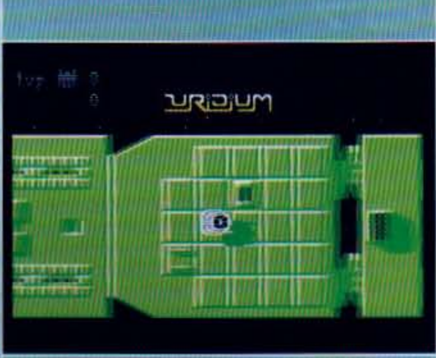
Phantasy Star Online players who regularly connect to the Internet world wide: **40,000**





Konami's publicity campaign gathers momentum enabling you to go head to head with Solid Snake





Braybrook's super-slick C64 shooter could be the first of many retro titles to reach Game Boy Advance



Hopefully the Attic bug POKE will no longer be required for the promised update of *Jet Set Willy*





Make the internal gyroscope reach speeds over 10,000rpm and the feeling is 'beyond description'



Spielberg's Lego vision encourages young film-makers and presumably has Keanu Reeves worried





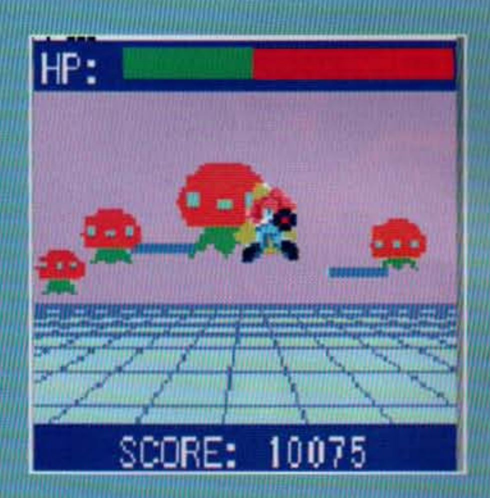
Aibo may look cute, but the poker face is sure to confound even the most patient owner



Coming to a phone near you: the doubtless arcade-perfect *Space Harrier* courtesy of NTT and Sega



The release of Ryu and friends' next adventure coincides with the tenth anniversary of *SFII*





Edge managed to get hold of three animation cels, which the team is reluctantly offering to readers



The Digital Creations Milia party bag allowed **Edge** to test its colouring skills – with impressive results

RYU & SHUN

06 Teaching an old dog new tricks

UK: The first wave of expansion software for Sony's popular Aibo robot is now available to buy. The upgrades will enable owners to engage in 'advanced' play with their digital companions. Aibos taking advantage of the modules will now be able to sing along to popular tunes – no doubt livening up even the dullest dinner party. And those rich enough to own two of the creatures will be able to make them compete in a novel memory test card game. The *Party Mascot* software can be purchased from www.aibo.com for £64.

07 Harrier on your handset

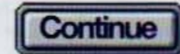
UK: After Sega's recent announcement that it would be focusing on a range of hardware platforms, it has emerged that legendary title *Space Harrier* will be joining *ChuChu Rocket*, *Samba de Amigo* and *NiGHTS* on NTT DoCoMo's i-Mode phones. Boasting not-quite-arcade-perfect graphics, the game should whet the appetite in advance of the release of the game's spiritual successor, *Planet Harrier*.

08 Street Fighter Alpha hits DVD

UK: Ryu cannot contain the dark energy which threatens to overpower his mind and soul. Worse still, his long-lost brother, Shun, has been kidnapped by Dark Hadou – the vicious leader of Shadowlaw. Such two-dimensional melodrama marks yet another chapter in the on-going *Street Fighter* cinematic story, set for DVD release on April 30 for £18. Early copies include animation cels, and **Edge** has three cels to give away. To win, send your names to us. The draw will take place on April 23.

09 Colouring in right up to the Edge

UK: Edge came back from Milia with a sackful of cutting edge multimedia technology in the shape of DVDs and business-card shaped CD-ROMs. But the freebie that stood out the most came from Digital Creations. In keeping with the future technology theme of the event, it was giving out party bags containing colouring books and lollipops – at least giving **Edge** something to do on the plane home.



The Independent Games Developers Trade Association
After all, it's about time codeshops stood up for themselves
Sega Smash Pack Volume 1
Dead games on a dying format – but still supremely entertaining
Old Man Murray
The Fry & Laurie to every other game humour site's Hale & Pace

Quit

The infamous 'X-Files' 'FPS' episode
Yes, **Edge** has only just seen it. And still can't stop cringing
The darker side of Edge-Online's forum
After such a promising start, along come the utter clots
***Phantasy Star Online* item hawkers**
At least the Japanese servers provide respite from Ebay-happy idiots



10 Cobralingus

If words are music, then Jeff Noon is your mixmaster. Cobralingus is the name Noon – of 'Vurt' and 'Pixel Juice' fame – gives to a process of deranged writing ('Metamorphiction') inspired by experimental music. Take a text, push it through various filters ('overload', 'enhance', 'purify'), introduce samples (anything from the shipping forecast to body parts), and transform it into something unrecognisable, yet uncannily familiar.

'Cobralingus', the book, is a demonstration of this technique (see www.conbralingus.com for an interactive version) – an exercise in rewriting classic as well as lesser-known texts (including extracts from Shakespeare, Emily Dickenson, and even something from Noon himself).

Noon gives us a straight-faced textbook-style introduction to the Cobralingus Engine: "This process imagines text to be a signal, which can be passed through various FILTER GATES… to produce an INTERIM text, which is transmitted further along the pathway."

The game may not be to everyone's taste, but the results are mostly worth it: a couple of fine poems amid a smattering of weird wordplay. Noon promises that the real fun is to be had during foreplay – 'From inlet to outlet, the journey is the goal' – which is just as well, because there are quite a few anticlimaxes.

Read it, and you'll realise Noon is poking fun at his own pretensions – he's a slippery creature, a self-confessed word snake seducing the witless admirer: 'I sing/ … In cobras uncurling a glorious slurring/ … Uncoiling in closing, in labouring long/ A singular boa conscribing a song.' Only die-hard Noon fans need shout for a rewind.

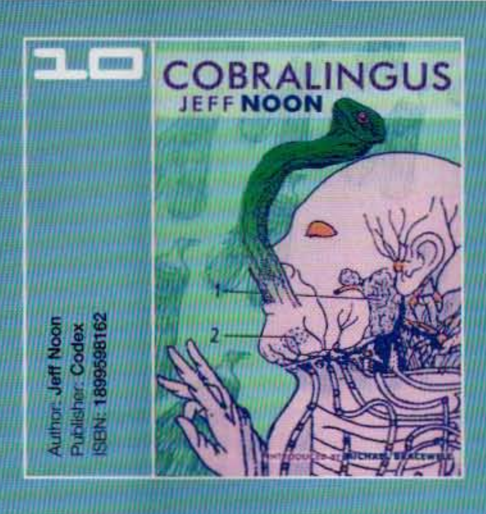
11 Sonic Boom

As Napster lies licking its wounds in the wake of its 16-month-long legal fight for life [its survival still uncertain as **Edge** goes to press], there's one thing the battle has proved without a shadow of a doubt: online music sharing has pissed off a lot of people.

The story of online music trading began long before this file-swapping phenomenon hit the scene. Wind back to the 1990s, just as the Web was leaving academia and a handful of slow-loading Web sites posted indie tracks for download. Then suddenly the whole thing went supernova with the invention of the MP3 file format.

Glancing through brief histories of such legendary names such as the Internet Underground Music Archive (IUMA), MP3.com, and Winamp, John Alderman does a fine job sketching out the evolution of online music trading as we know it today. But with a few interesting exceptions, most of the commentary will be familiar to anyone who's been following the story over the past few years. There's nothing much you won't have read before elsewhere.

Alderman is a fan of the Internet's Robin Hood-like beneficence and comes down hard on the record label: 'The entertainment industry [has to] make up for a century of screwing its artists'. In his conclusion he presents an optimistic way forward from Napster's current impasse, but in reality the story in the courts isn't over and what lies ahead is far from clear. In terms of history, it's just too early to have written this book.



Author: **Jeff Noon**
Publisher: **Codex**
ISBN: **1899598162**



Author: **John Alderman**
Publisher: **4th Estate**
ISBN: **1841155128**



Site: **HeroMachine**
URL: **www.heromachine.com**

12 Web site of the month

'Have you ever been frustrated by an inability to see a character you've imagined?' asks the HeroMachine Web site. Should the roster of animated plumbers, hedgehogs, pneumatic archaeologists, undercover agents and famous sports stars under your TV leave your imagination underfunded, HeroMachine is here to help. Offering a shockingly simple interface with which to 'dynamically create your own customised character portrait' the results, as you can see, are impressive, and should eliminate the need for any artistic ability on the part of the user, offering an important shortcut for any budding Miyamotos.



13 Advertainment

Japan: With 2.7 million Game Boy Advance preorders in existence at the last count, you wouldn't think it'd need advertising, but NCL is giving Japanese TV watchers a taste anyway.

01-04. Voiceover: "Game Boy Advance" 05. "Rocket start!" 06. "Go! Go! Go!" 07. "A few more!" 08. "Burst turn!" 09-10. "Yeah!" 11. "Jump!" 12. "Oh, nooo!" 13. "With one cartridge, we can play 4P! Be at one and share the same fun!" 14. "Fight for 0.01 second!" 15-16. "Game Boy Advance *F-Zero*"

"Die, fukker!" Some 30 hours into his second character on *Phantasy Star Online*, RedEye finds himself questing deep in the mines of Ragol with two young American teens. They're running helter-skelter, slashing and burning, and pinching items at will. Most of what they've said has been obliterated thanks to Sega's ultra-cautious profanity censorship, but it's safe to say their emphasis isn't on teamwork or tactics. RedEye sighs, and takes a few shots at a robot across the other side of the electric cavern. The robot drops, and a new wave teleports in. "Fuk!!!" one screams, after taking a fatal rocket to the ego. The other one runs over and picks up his weapons and cash. RedEye sighs again. Where've all the good guys gone?

Answer: they're off selling their excess stock on eBay, currently host to more than 200 *Phantasy Star Online* item auctions. Materialism seems to be everything on the collection of ships that make up the game's European and US presence. Slip over to the Japanese servers, and you're far more likely to find someone ready to give you their hard-won equipment, purely in the cause of international relations. Friendships are cemented by the conversation system: what other game automatically translates all queries on bodyboarding into five separate languages?

Besides, from the moment a Japanese man (dressed as a small girl, with bunches and an impressively short skirt, naturally) asked RedEye whether they shared an interest in the jazz dance scene, it was obvious *Phantasy Star Online*'s multilingual aspect was going to have some sort of impact on gaming. But maybe that impact was underestimated, since following *Phantasy Star Online*'s PAL release some of RedEye's friends have started speaking a different language.

"You weren't on Titan?"

"Iapetus 5, as always..."

"Right. 'Cause I was on the Japanese server scoring myself generous amounts of Trimate."

"Yeah, the problem is, because I'm a FOnewm, I need fluid."

"You can have mine. It really isn't of much use to a RAcaseal, to be honest."

It's incomprehensible to an outsider, but *Phantasy Star Online* has sucked in even the most resolutely anti-stat members of RedEye's gaming clique, and now they can't stop themselves from comparing MST and ATA ratings with their peers. After all, this is a game that's more about character envy than trying to reach a single goal. And, since it's also a game with an acutely social aspect, it's hardly surprising the conversations creep from the Sega servers into RedEye's local hostelry.

"I can't believe we nailed that worm last night," says one of RedEye's friends. "Course, it was down to my Force skills. Did you see the hit points my Razonde generated?"

Not the sort of stuff likely to impress any outsiders listening in, but the game's so compulsive that RedEye actually forgets to cringe. Hey, we're among friends here, and we're just discussing a shared experience; the fact that it's still shrouded in an impenetrable geek mystique gets completely forgotten.

Back in the present, the second teen is under attack from the machine. RedEye is unmotivated to help him. "Fuk!" shouts the dead guy again. "!!!!" says his peer as three rockets impact on his Force's fast fading health bar. He dies. "Resurrect me!" they echo. No 'please'. No 'thank you'. Tsk. RedEye opens fire.

This battle shouldn't prove much of a problem, since RedEye is something of a Ragol veteran, having been slicing and shooting beasts since the game's Japanese release. European appearances on the servers at that point were, obviously, minimal, so friendships had to be forged using the in-built translation system and short snatches of broken English. "Do you like gigs?" asked one stocky green ranger. "Gigs?" enquired RedEye, mind flicking instantly through nights of distorted J-pop Upstairs at the Garage. Boom Boom Satellites? Mika Bomb? "Paul Gascoigne!" came the reply.

Fun, but there's no doubting the game gets better when it's played with real-life acquaintances, even though the lines between *Phantasy* and reality are often blurred. One of RedEye's friends has chosen to play as a girl, arguing that he's more comfortable with her levelling structure. That's fine; more awkward is the way another comrade seemed to be slightly too interested in her character development. "You're really small... but cute," the intrigued gent coyly whispered. Stop. Shock. Recoil. "Hey, it's all virtual," he responded. RedEye quit before the conversation went much further.

But, funnily enough, forming a bond – be it jazz dance, bodyboarding, or something slightly more seedy – seems to be the key to *Phantasy* perfection. Play properly, play with teamwork, and it's so, so easy to be a hero. Rush in and save the weak characters at the last moment, or be the one who's saved; everyone has a role, everyone lives that role to the fullest, and it's brilliant. Play in a group where you couldn't care less about your comrades, though, and the whole experience changes.

Meanwhile, the large green robot takes one final blast to the head, and keels over. A pastel-coloured speech bubble appears above one of the two dead bodies.

"Resurrect me!"

Silence.

"Hello????"

RedEye glances at the Meseta that litters the floor.

"Don't steal my items!"

Pardon?

"Please? Please????????"

RedEye walks away. Hey, somebody's got to be the good guy.



REDEYE

Commentary from inside the videogame industry

Phantasy and reality: telling the difference

Forming a bond – be it jazz dance, bodyboarding, or something slightly more seedy – seems to be the key to *Phantasy* perfection

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge**'s



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Tempo: the primary importance of pacing

One of the more intangible desiderata of a good videogame is its tempo. Not in the simple sense of speed, but the structural ebb and flow of the gameplaying experience – how moments of high stress (say, battling a boss in *Zelda 64*) may be balanced against other periods of relative calm or nonviolent suspense (Link taking time out to do a bit of fishing).

In games such as *Resident Evil* or *Silent Hill* that aspire to the cinematic, the pattern of tempo is clearly drawn from the movies: crawling around the Nostromo's ducts in Ridley Scott's 'Alien' is interspersed with shocking apparitions of the slimy xenomorph, just as wandering through eerily silent streets and rooms in survival horror games is punctuated by shattering noise and drooling zombies. While it may seem that adrenaline-based twitch games have no room for such tempo variation, even in racers such as *Gran Turismo* a varying tempo is lent to the player's campaign by the differing styles of 'mission' that must be completed, from sprints around short circuits to multi-race championships. Much of the fun of twoplayer beat 'em ups, meanwhile, lies in the way the opponents conspire to create a balletic tempo of their own, alternating suspenseful stand-offs with flurries of blows.

Crucial to the overall flow of tempo is the pattern of player rewards. Media psychologists use the term 'reinforcement' to describe how a player is rewarded for their actions. Rewards in themselves can take many forms – the acquiring of new skills or new weapons, simply seeing the next level or getting a lap record or high score – but the pattern of reinforcement needs to be very finely tuned to induce that 'one more go' feeling. Too much reinforcement, or reinforcement that is regular and predictable, and the player quickly becomes bored; too little reinforcement and they get frustrated and abandon the game. What is desirable, it turns out, is 'partial reinforcement' – giving the player enough to induce the feeling that the next reward is just around the corner, even if it isn't.

The design of reinforcement strategies is not an exact science, because there will always be a varying range of skills. Most players may happily find it sufficiently challenging, while a minority may sail through it. The classic way to palliate this problem is the strategy of handing over control of tempo during short periods to the player by offering risk-reward scenarios. The game offers the player an option of attempting something risky in return for a greater reward – whether it be an extra life, a shiny new gun, or a speedier victory. But the risk is, crucially, voluntary. The player can choose not to attempt it if they feel their skills are already being fully tested, but the confident player can thus gain extra satisfaction out of exactly the same part of the game.

Risk-reward scenarios are everywhere: do you choose to negotiate a hail of bullets in order to get that tasty weapons-upgrade pod? Do you try to land that human safely in *Defender*, or do you just concentrate on getting the Mutant off your back? Do you want to try to break that guard's neck in *Metal Gear Solid* instead of just sneaking past him? Do you go for the elaborate throw in *Dead Or Alive 2*, and risk being reversed, or are you satisfied with a simple jab and retreat? In short: do you feel lucky, punk?

> Do you go for the elaborate throw in *Dead Or Alive 2*, and risk being reversed, or do you jab and retreat? In short: do you feel lucky, punk?

Risk-reward makes videogames fun because we enjoy it in other walks of life, too. The investor in tech shares, for instance, like any other gambler, is driven by a love of risk-reward scenarios. And it is also inherent in every popular sport. Do you go for the spectacular baseline drive in a game of tennis and risk hitting the net, or do you just get the ball in with less power? If you're a striker, do you attempt a Gazza-style juggle and volley into the goal and risk looking really stupid when it doesn't work?

The pleasure of some videogames, indeed, is heavily dependent on their concentration on risk-reward scenarios. Consider the seminal puzzle franchise *Bust-A-Move*. The game is constantly daring you to build a perilous dangling stalactite of bubbles in the hope that the right colour will eventually appear for you to dump it on your opponent's side of the screen. A good player needs to take that risk constantly. The structural tempo of *Metropolis Street Racer*, meanwhile, is made compelling by the inbuilt risk-reward scenario of gambling with your kudos by rerunning races. Or how about the uniquely beautiful choreography of *Bushido Blade*? It encouraged a highly suspenseful tempo of constant advance and retreat between the players – and that was because the very idea of attacking, in a game of one-hit kills, is itself a risk-reward scenario.

The psychological importance of risk-reward scenarios is emphasised by developer Cas Cremers, of Dutch studio Shape 9, who has created a fascinating concept game in which risk-reward is built into the very control system. Playing something like a cross between *Asteroids* and *Speedball*, the game, *Scalar*, constantly dares the player to move his ship out of the relatively safe zone at the centre in order to be able to destroy more targets – but this is an inherently risky exercise. This disturbingly addictive bit of Web candy can be played for free at http://games.shape9.nl/scalar/showcase/index.html.

The importance of risk-reward scenarios to videogame pleasure, and their contribution to exciting variations in tempo, would seem unarguable – yet games are still regularly released that take no advantage of this guarantor of psychological addiction. The total absence of any meaningful risk-reward architecture (aside from the twee sub-quests), for example, is the primary reason why *Shenmue* can be so hypnotically dull. In the end, the concept can be applied at an industry-wide level, too. For if developers don't offer us risks, why should we reward them?

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Juan Montes

VP and director of techn

Photography: **Martin Thompson**



profile

Videogaming's movers and shakers

r Motorola's personal communications sector (EMEA)

"I look at it beyond just one platform. You can open up into community-based entertainment, into wider demographics where you can grow the percentage of female users"

With mobile gaming ubiquitous at the moment, be it at last year's ECTS or this year's Milia, gamers can be forgiven for being slightly nonplussed by the current crop of WAP titles. But with everyone from network operators, through big-name publishers, to start-up developers and handset manufacturers limbering up for what is perceived to be a land grab, the present European standard provides the opportunity to re-educate users about the way phones are used. More importantly, it also offers the opportunity to work out which revenue models and game designs are going to work with forthcoming, more advanced, technologies. Indeed, cynics may do well to cast their minds back to when the conventional console industry was on the cusp of new technologies in the shape of advanced 3D graphics courtesy of Sony's PlayStation. Because **Juan Montes**, who, as vice president of development, was at the heart of Sony's success in redefining the console landscape, is attempting to do it all again with Motorola.

It is tempting to see Sony's eventual impact on the videogame industry as inevitable, but when Montes – freshly installed from US database company Ingres – arrived at SCEE, the company was more or less starting from scratch. Finding his way through Japanese videogame culture via the likes of *Kileak: The Blood*, he played an important role in fostering an energetic thirdparty development community that was crucial to the console's success. "In the first year there was interest in PlayStation and Sony from all different angles," he reminisces. "Interest and probably scepticism at the same time, because people would argue that the company didn't know anything about games." But the challenge of cultivating the community that did was one which Montes relished. "I always enjoyed talking to content people, be it from Sony's studios or from other places, just to understand the obstacles and the experiences that they faced," he explains. "I found that fascinating. To see how technology can evolve, and what games made it big and why. To see what made them stand out from a creative point of view, or from a publisher's point of view. I have seen some poor games make it to the top with excellent marketing and hype, and I have seen some pretty good games being left to word of mouth, which doesn't make the same sort of impact."

Although his remit isn't quite the same at Motorola, clearly his experience is likely to stand him in good stead. "Here at Motorola I find myself in almost unknown waters as such, but some of the things that I worked on in those days are being put in to practice again. I think it's key to develop that creative community, and not just on one platform." Indeed rather than attempting to launch a console, Motorola – and Montes – is attempting to launch an industry: "We're looking to try and play a leadership role in the development of some key technologies – GPRS and Java primarily." Hence the recent developers conference: "to share some of the issues that will confront all of us, the creative community and Motorola, as to how we deploy content and how we integrate that content into the operators environment."

One such issue is the negative PR that surrounds WAP at the moment, but Montes is adamant that this can be overcome: "I think with GPRS there is the opportunity to show people that you can get faster access to content than with WAP, but I think more than that, it's important not to focus on the technology. It's time to focus on the content. I think that's what iMode has done very successfully in Japan. They didn't draw attention to their browser or the type of network they were using."

Obviously, if Montes is as successful with this approach as he was when involved with the PlayStation, the repercussions for the industry could be even more significant. "I look at it beyond just one platform, to launching what I think should be a significant industry, with a lot of opportunities beyond the traditional gaming opportunity," he explains. "Here you can open up into community-based entertainment, into much wider demographics where you can grow the percentage of female users."

Edge's most wanted

F-Zero
Marking a return to the SNES version of the franchise, this Game Boy Advance title promises to deliver all the hi-octane thrills of its predecessor.



(GBA) Nintendo

Monkey Ball
One of the more novel (without being completely ridiculous) offerings at AOU. *Monkey Ball*'s inertia madness should be coming to console formats soon.



(coin-op) Sega

Wai Wai Racing
Konami's *Mario*-inspired karting game should provide an attractive stopgap solution in the absence of the genuine article when the handheld launches in Japan.



(GBA) Konami

Kuru Kuru Kururin
Perfect for a portable, guiding Kururin's spinning helicopter blade through tightly winding mazes looks likely to entertain and frustrate in equal measures.



(GBA) Konami

Taking online communion

Facing off against the faceless

It is often argued that online multiplayer gaming will never quite deliver the exuberance experienced when a group of friends gather around a single TV set for a bout of *Mario Kart* or *GoldenEye*. The immediacy of insulting opponents sat across from you, and more importantly, watching as their facial expressions change from smugness to rage, is a vital component still missing from online play.

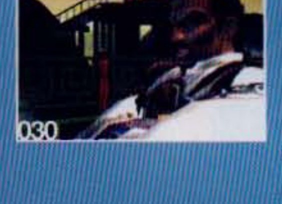
Yet such broad comparisons between the two modes of play do little justice to the subtleties of interaction online gaming can offer. While the popular notion of online gaming still remains entrenched in the terms 'frag', 'flame', and 'fear raid', there is a unifying component to Internet gaming which is often overlooked.

Even when online games do not enable players to communicate directly, it is the shared experience which can qualitatively transform a title. *ChuChu Rocket* and *Ferrari F355* are played against completely faceless opponents online. Little interaction is possible (although simple exclamations can be produced with the trigger buttons in *Chu Chu Rocket*). Indeed, Yu Suzuki's driving title has a curious online component. Take DC *F355* for a spin online and you will never actually rub bumpers with rivals. Courses are selected, qualifying completed, and races won on an open track with only the engine noises for company. Only in the replays are the relative skills of opponents shown.

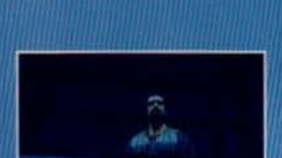
This sounds like a hollow encounter, but actually there is a soundless tension and competitive spirit which is difficult to experience in any other gaming arena. The fact that the same names arrive back on the starting grid for yet another engagement speaks volumes.

It is the sense of communion with other gamers, often across time zones, which enhances the enjoyment. Worlds which take advantage of such a psychological force are still in their infancy. Yuji Naka's *Phantasy Star Online* provides gamers with the chance to craft their own characters. Digital anonymity is a licence to behave in ways we would baulk at in day-to-day life. And while there are a few idiots wandering around Ragol's forests and caves, most use the opportunity to let a unique and creative personality shine through.

Development in online play is set to deliver ever more subtle gaming experiences in the very near future. One day they may even be capable of fully harnessing the raw dance energy that is *PSO*'s Loco Latino.



030



032



037

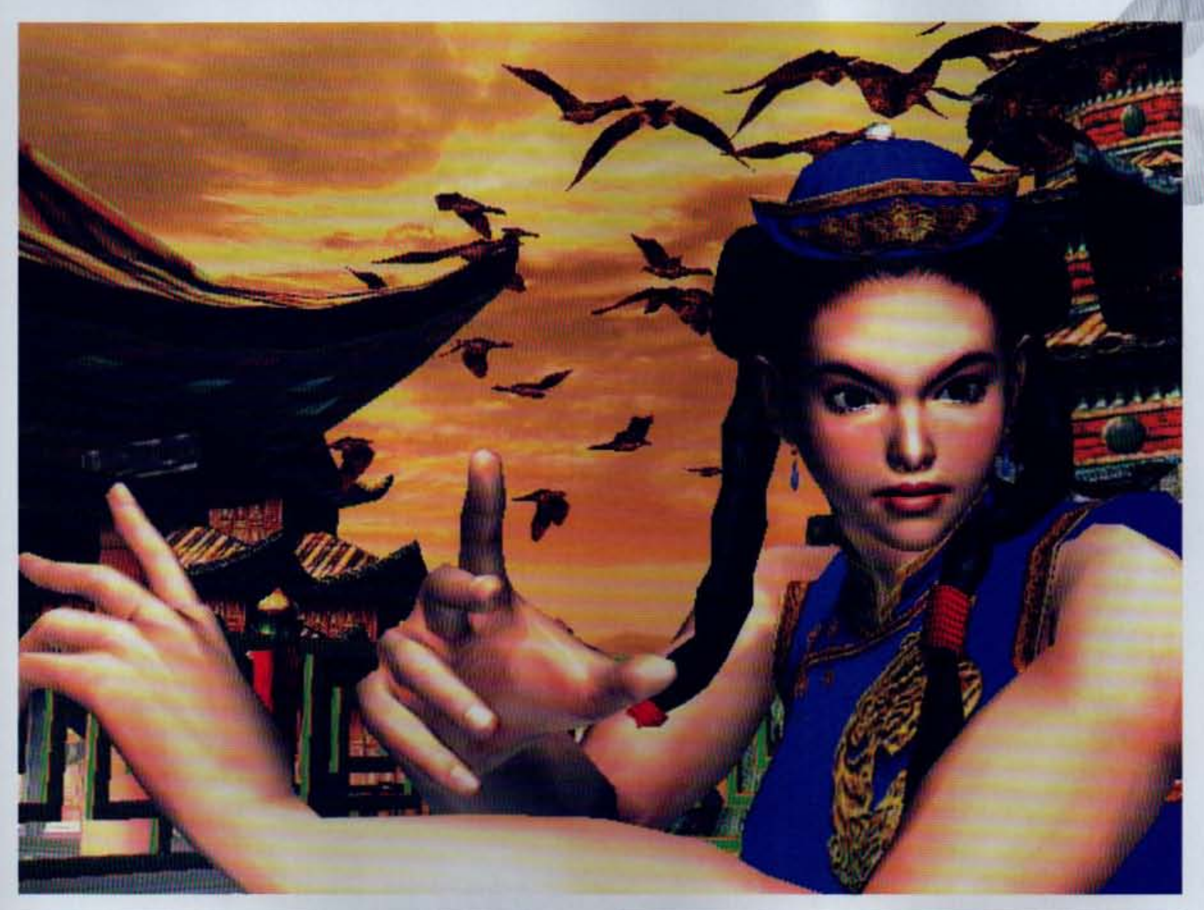




037

Virtua Fighter 4

Yu Suzuki unveils the fourth instalment in the *Virtua Fighter* franchise, and announces some tweaks – although there is no playable code from which to gauge their effect



This year's Amusement Operators Union event saw Yu Suzuki unveil the fourth instalment in the *Virtua Fighter* series – albeit without any form of playable code. Media from around the globe gathered in a surprisingly packed Makuhari Messe to hear Suzuki-san explain his plans for the title, hopefully innovating in the wake of the four-year-old *Virtua Fighter 3tb*.

Aesthetically speaking, there has been considerable improvement, chiefly due to the game's Naomi 2-powered hardware. While tentatively slated as a PS2 exclusive, the title's first lease of life will be on Sega's proprietary arcade board, allegedly allowing for lighting effects and visual finesse in advance of Sony's console. One such stage sees a night-time fight take place on a windswept rooftop around which a helicopter circles, tracking both combatants with spotlights. Sets such as this allow for texture detail to be highlighted, as *Shenmue* is ostensibly responsible for much in the way of *Virtua Fighter 4*'s human motion – character hands benefit from realistic animation, with individual lines visible and faces expressing emotions to match the action. Clothing is also incredibly accurate in terms of physics modelling, and terrain is subject to constant change. Aoi takes to a snowbound stage, upon which footprints will be left by the combatants as the flakes drift and pile up. All told, AM2 is promising in the region of ten million polygons, which will be fully lit and effected.

In terms of game mechanics, several amendments have been made: the fourth dodge button has been dropped in favour of true three-dimensional movement, through six variable directions. Quite how this will differ to *Soul Calibur*'s 'eight-way run' feature, or even *Dead Or Alive 2*'s '360°' circling technique is unknown, but hopefully the finished product will reflect more than creative labelling. There have also been rumours of a novice setting that will automate certain combination or blocking moves for the less experienced player, although whether arcade owners are likely to set the dip-switches accordingly is a moot point.

The predictable inclusion of new characters has been met, if only in meagre proportions; two additional names – one female, one male – included. The latter appears to be an ageing Oriental monk, one obvious trait being his fierce



The familiar beached surroundings of the first game return. Naturally, detail has been increased tenfold

Quite how bordered arenas will affect the 'ring out' rule is hard to ascertain. As much as it is a valid inclusion, victory through a freak evasive manoeuvre, rather than skill, leaves a bitter taste in the mouth

In terms of game mechanics, amendments have been made – the fourth dodge button dropped in favour of true 3D movement

Format: **Coin-op/PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **In-house (AM2)**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **TBC**



Siblings Pai and Lau may often face off despite an equally matched fighting style. Both are fast and athletic, with kicks and jumps featuring heavily

attack speeds. In order to preserve the player's combat history, Sega will be utilising a game-save medium, possibly the card system from the recent *Club Kart* arcade machine (see **E**95). Suzuki-san has expressed a desire to see arcade-goers battling head to head, or exchanging accumulated experience, via the relevant game save.

There's never been any doubt that the *Virtua Fighter* franchise offers an open-ended, skill-driven experience that appeals more to the Otaku than the casual gamer. That Sega has openly admitted its intention to port to the relatively alien PS2 would suggest that *Virtua Fighter 4* may offer a more immediate rush – the lack of a dodge button, plus the purported novice setting, indicating thoughts of a home version. Of course, a Dreamcast version cannot be ruled out, but the chances of this grow slimmer by the day.

Before any of this, however, the title must debut in coin-op form. The five-year wait should point to a pushed envelope in terms of game calibre – Yu Suzuki rarely panders to the massmarket, and, ultimately, the success of the arcade incarnation may allude to the future status of the series in console form. With a playable build expected at JAMMA later this year, you'll be able to read about any developments in **Edge**.







It is abundantly clear from the above screens that the quality of the textures has been considerably uprated. Problems with the eventual conversion to PS2 may require a 'downgrading' of bitmap sizes





Fighting through the ages

Virtua Fighter (top) took the polygon engine from *Virtua Racing*, heralding the inception of today's 3D brawlers. The appearance of full texture maps and faster action in *VF2* (centre) afforded the series a new lease of life. (The Saturn conversion remains arguably the best home fighting game ever.) *VF3tb* (above) wasn't as marked an improvement, but added a dodge element and more interaction with game environments.

Headhunter

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Amuze**
Origin: **Sweden**
Release: **Q3**

Amuze's high-concept amnesiac-cop-on-a-mission narrative may not set the heart racing, but the developer believes it has the next *Metal Gear Solid* on its hands



WinBack players may find some of these shots disconcertingly familiar, though given the crates-and-guns setting, it's likely most gamers will be experiencing some level of déjà vu

One glance at *Headhunter*'s plot summary is all it takes to show Amuze's willingness to take the cliché head on. A renegade ex-cop suffering a bad case of amnesia in a dystopian future is hired by a beautiful but strong-willed young woman to investigate the murder of her father. Going by this pitch, if *Headhunter* was a movie it'd be a straight-to-video affair starring Van Damme, but the DC faithful will hope for better from a game that has pretensions to being Sega's answer to *Metal Gear Solid 2*.

As rebel vigilante Jack Wade, you'll be carrying your own particular brand of murder investigation through the decaying cities of a corrupt California. Though *Shenmue* seems to be the obvious reference point for the scenes which see Jack wandering round town investigating the mystery, *Headhunter*'s placid moments may be closer to *Shadow Of Memories* on PS2, particularly in the use of a fixed-camera perspective for when the player is inside a building. Featureless wall texturing brings to mind the lacklustre visuals of *Operation WinBack*, and hopefully Amuze has managed to avoid the repetitive combat that also dogged Koei's title.

The game isn't limited to asking questions first and shooting later, though. Wade is an avid biker, and transport between the various locations is made on an impressively recreated motorcycle. Users will be able





The multiplayer racing aspect of *Headhunter* sounds interesting, but the game engine may not be best suited to recreating motorcycle physics





Smart shadowing and rain effects will go some way towards rendering Amuze's crime-ridden vision with a cinematic quality appropriate to its Abbey Road OST

to race human opponents via SegaNet, with up to eight players taking part in inter-city challenges. This is an interesting touch, although some may remember LucasArts trying a similar thing in its worst ever graphic adventure, *Full Throttle*, and it's to be hoped that Amuze isn't using the same sub-game tactic to distract the player from weaknesses elsewhere. Viewing the move without cynicism, it's laudable that the developer is attempting to introduce some variety. Just as interestingly, the oft-underused VMU will act as a pager for *Headhunter*'s world, issuing the player with information and in-game messages. But it's musically where the game seems set to push the most boundaries.

Recorded at Abbey Road studios with a 67-piece orchestra, the soundtrack clearly forms the focus of a great deal of Amuze's pride in the project. Assembled specifically for the title, the performers have credits including performances with Robbie Williams and All Saints, and the soundtracks for 'The World Is Not Enough' and 'The Mummy'. According to the developer, this is the first time an orchestra of this calibre has been used to perform a game soundtrack. While this should enhance *Headhunter* atmospherically, the real question remains whether Amuze has created a cinematic game experience worthy of accompanying it.

Prisoner Of War

Format: **PlayStation2/PC**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **Wide Games**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4**

Codemasters prepares to burrow out of captivity with an adventure game set in World War II prisoner of war camps – or at least those run according to the rules of cinema







In keeping with the conventions of war films, Allied officers of different nationalities have different aptitudes. It's a fair bet that the British are a little shaky on languages, and if the Americans aren't the athletic ones, then there's no justice in this world

Mainly thanks to the covert exploits of Solid Snake, 'stealth' is the byword for just about every adventure game currently in development; all of them promising new levels of suspense for the gamer who loves sneaking behind enemy lines. Now Codemasters is getting in on the act with a title that, if in concept alone, promises to take stealth-and-strategy gameplay to its logical conclusion.

Prisoner Of War is a thirdperson adventure set in German POW camps during World War II. Players control four Allied officers (British, French, Dutch, and American), each specialising in different escape skills (such as linguistics, espionage, and athleticism). The task is to guide them out of captivity using all the tactical cunning you can muster.

The prisoners operate independently as they attempt to escape their respective camps – Salonika, Stalag Luft, and Stalag Luft III – before meeting in the infamous, 'escape-proof' Castle Colditz.

With the constant threat of discovery and punishment, *Prisoner Of War* has all the ingredients for some thrilling, nerve-jangling videogame escapades. Whether players will be able to break out of Colditz using nothing more than a strategically placed vaulting horse is still to be confirmed, however.

Extermination

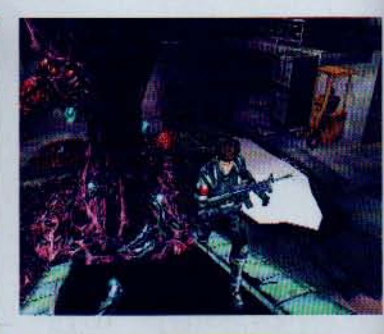
Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEI**
Developer: **Deep Space**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q3 (Japan) TBC (UK)**

You're alone in an abandoned outpost. Mutants appear to be proliferating all around you. You've got to try to get out alive. Could it be you're dealing with a resident evil?

Don't be too disturbed by the cloying sense of dread – it is only the realisation that another survival horror clone is about to hit the market. While Capcom's *Resident Evil* series has enthralled gamers since 1996, the feeling that the genre is, at least creatively, in its final death throes is difficult to dismiss. The lucrative formula of corridor negotiation, switch pulling, and, of course, slap-happy multi-tentacled creatures will be regurgitated for a series of PS2 titles to be published by Sony.

Since **Edge** last previewed *Extermination* (**E**94) a glut of screenshots and a dribble of additional information has been revealed. While the plot follows a typical abandoned-outpost-overrun-with-mutant-creatures blueprint, *Extermination* will at least try to update matters with a dynamic control mechanism. Hero Dennis Riley will be able to shimmy up pipes and climb across certain roof scenery, and while the visuals are underwhelming, it is heartening to know that the 3D world offers free-roaming cameras rather than the stagnant prerendered scenes beloved of Capcom's series. Though Deep Space's first PS2 title is looking like tasty fodder for fans of the genre, others may find the usual gameplay staples less than appetising.







The creatures inhabiting the *Extermination* world are a weird and amorphous bunch. The usual collecting of weapons and ammo will be a large part of the game. Hopefully Deep Space has implemented more novel ways of dispatching enemies, mixing brain with brawn, rather than the usual method of selecting ever-more-potent firepower as the game progresses

The Getaway

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **In-house (Team Soho)**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4**

Team Soho is steadily recreating Old London Town on PS2, but with the in-game animation still in its early stages, the project's Christmas deadline looks a stretch

If *The Getaway* is anything to go by, the digital camera may be one of the most valuable tools for use in 128bit development. Twenty-five thousand images have already been snapped and transformed into scenery textures for the game. It has been a painstaking process, but the incredible level of detail (including all brand names and major landmarks) has guaranteed the title a good deal of notoriety. While the attention to detail is exemplary, the team has had to compromise in certain areas – street furniture, such as crash barriers and lampposts, have been removed or repositioned to smooth out driving lines for high-speed chases.

Two thirds of the game's streets have already been completed, but, crucially, the in-game animation is less in evidence. While it is likely that the team which coded the enjoyable *Porsche Challenge* will be capable of delivering a consummate driving experience, the out-of-car action sequences (which will include shootouts and infiltrating buildings) will be a much more challenging prospect. Abandoning cars, learning the flow of the traffic, and escaping down quiet back streets will all be essential aspects of the final game. Ideally, such lofty ambition will be matched by similarly stunning gameplay.







If SCEE is to be believed, *The Getaway* will feature warehouse shootouts, coppers dragging criminals from cars, and pedestrians reacting in realtime to the player's actions. Pulling out a gun in the high street will send the public fleeing in terror, and alerting the police in the process. An Xmas release will be tight

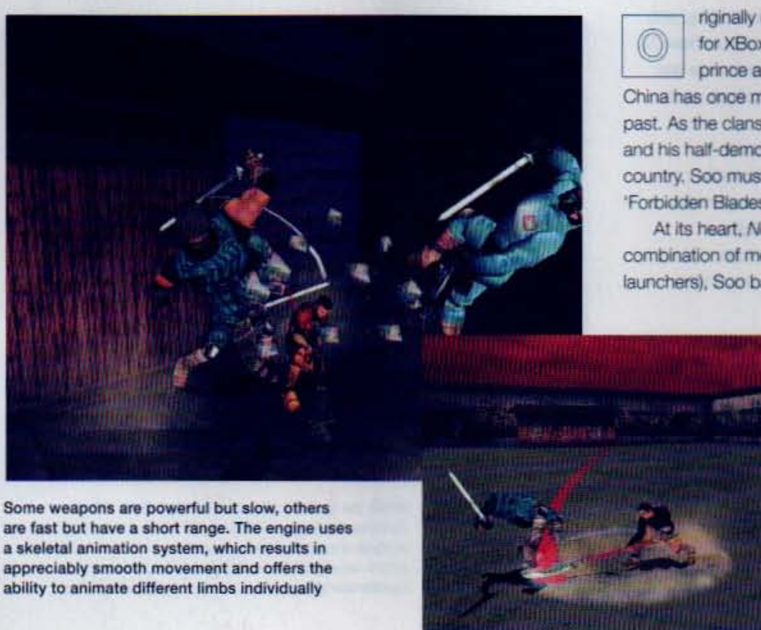
New Legends

Format: **XBox**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Infinite Machine**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q3 (US) TBC (UK)**

China has descended into a state approaching anarchy, and evil forces are trying to grab the opportunity to assume control. Only warrior prince Sun Soo can stop them







Some weapons are powerful but slow, others are fast but have a short range. The engine uses a skeletal animation system, which results in appreciably smooth movement and offers the ability to animate different limbs individually

Originally conceived for the PC but now completely retooled for XBox, *New Legends* tells the story of Sun Soo, a warrior prince and son of a feudal lord. After many, many years of war, China has once more become divided into the fiefdoms of its ancient past. As the clans remain wary of each other, an evil warlord, Xao Gon, and his half-demon offspring attempt to seize power and conquer the country. Soo must defeat Gon's demon children and recover the five 'Forbidden Blades of Heaven' to free the land of evil.

At its heart, *New Legends* is a thirdperson, 3D action game. Using a combination of melée weapons and 'tech' weapons (guns and rocket launchers), Soo battles his way through China. The combat system enables Soo to use a weapon in each hand, although some require the use of both hands.

Soo is accompanied at various times by NPCs who will help out and perform various tasks. Most notable is Zhang, a crusty old man who carries Soo's extra weapons in a pack on his back. However, there's no need to worry that Soo's companions will get stuck in doors or end the game when they get shot. Their actions are mostly scripted, and they're around strictly to advance the story and assist Soo. If XBox is to succeed, this is exactly the kind of thinking it needs.

JoJo's Bizarre Adventure Chapter 5

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q3 (Japan) TBC (UK)**

JoJo continues his manga-inspired adventuring on PlayStation2, this time travelling to a cel-shaded Italy that Capcom has thus far presented in less-than-glorious technicolor







Translucent effects among the cel-shaded madness add to the manga-derived imagery, but it's *JoJo's* curious use of underwhelming colour tones that visually sets it apart from the sweetshop style of *Jet Set Radio*

'JoJo's Bizarre Adventure' is a famous manga licence in Japan, unheard of over here, and that may be part of the reason why it's been variously (and wrongly) described as some sort of graphic adventure, or a platform/exploration/interrogation hybrid.

Actually, it's a straight fighting game, and following similar Dreamcast and PlayStation versions, all the move to PlayStation2 has done is to transfer JoJo from his 2D home into a cel-shaded 3D Italy. The decision to use the vogue technique pioneered in *Jet Set Radio* is hardly surprising, given JoJo's origins, though the textures seem oddly washed out in comparison to Sega's inline skating project.

The combat system is based around the relationship between each fighter and his or her Stand, a powerful spirit. As in *Power Stone*, it's likely that some level of background interactivity will be possible, but, as ever, the extent to which this will be possible has yet to be clarified by the developer. Capcom hasn't confirmed that yet, but much of what it has revealed so far will already be familiar to hardcore *JoJo* fans. All the characters demonstrated so far have made an appearance in previous versions, but there's still time for the developer to announce some late additions to the fighting roster.

World Rally Championship 2001

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **Evolution Studios**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q3**

Slight mechanical setbacks keep Evolution's creation in the service area for a little longer, but come September, expect to see it back on the WRC circuit

As expected, SCEE's big rally hope will now miss its May slot, though by the time you read these few lines it should have hit alpha stage. All of the tracks are now in, the frame rate has apparently been improved by 150 per cent, and the twoplayer mode suffers no loss of graphical detail.

The actual dynamics model was finalised, until the team realised that it was realistic to the point of making it undriveable by all but the most committed – or talented – rallying videogamer. Expect a mode offering you the opportunity to try your digits at controlling an authentically handling WRC monster to remain somewhere in the code, but the default setting will take playability into account in a more substantial manner. But this isn't to say the effort put into generating the model has been wasted, as Banbury-based Subaru tuning specialist Prodrive (responsible for equipping and maintaining Subaru's WRC cars) may be looking to use Evolution's dynamics package as part of its WRC development process.

Edge should be getting the chance to try out *WRC 2001*'s driving model soon (at the time of the **E**91 Prescreen Focus, the team had four unrefined versions on the go), and will bring a report in due course.



While the game isn't expected to support *Gran Turismo 3*'s force-feedback wheel, current plans do include a proposal for a specific – if similar – device which would add a handbrake lever, given the handbrake's key role in the real world of rallying





Klonoa 2

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **March 22 (Japan) TBC (UK)**

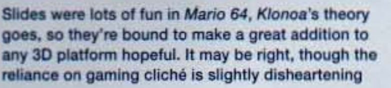
Namco presents a follow-up to *Klonoa* on Sony's 128bit machine, but bar slides, cannons, and hoops, at this stage its attractions appear to be minimal

After the appearance of the original *Klonoa* on PlayStation, the sequel moves to the PS2 just in time to exploit the poorly received first wave of titles that failed to exploit the on-paper power of Sony's machine.

Of course, that's not to say *Klonoa 2* is revolutionary in any way, since it offers exactly the same platform-game dynamic as its predecessor, which is exactly the same structure that has ruled the genre since the days of 8bit. The game is divided into several worlds, and each world is subdivided into areas. Most gamers won't be surprised to learn that each world is guarded by a boss.

So far, so generic. And the obligatory gimmick? *Klonoa*'s hero uses a hoop to capture enemies, which it can then use to fly, or just fling at other bad guys. Three main characters are available for selection, and allowing a second player to control another 'support' character – as Mega Drive gamers used to do with Sonic and Tails – is slightly more interesting, as are the huge stage-crossing cannons and slides that are reminiscent of Sonic's DC outings. A simple control system based around the analogue stick and two action buttons is laudable, too, but it's the simple outlook that may render *Klonoa* somewhat redundant.









Slides were lots of fun in *Mario 64*, *Klonoa*'s theory goes, so they're bound to make a great addition to any 3D platform hopeful. It may be right, though the reliance on gaming cliché is slightly disheartening

Armored Core New Age

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **From Software**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q2**

From Software's mecha franchise marches boldly on, taking Sony's broadband commitment at face value, offering a twoplayer option via thirdparty modems





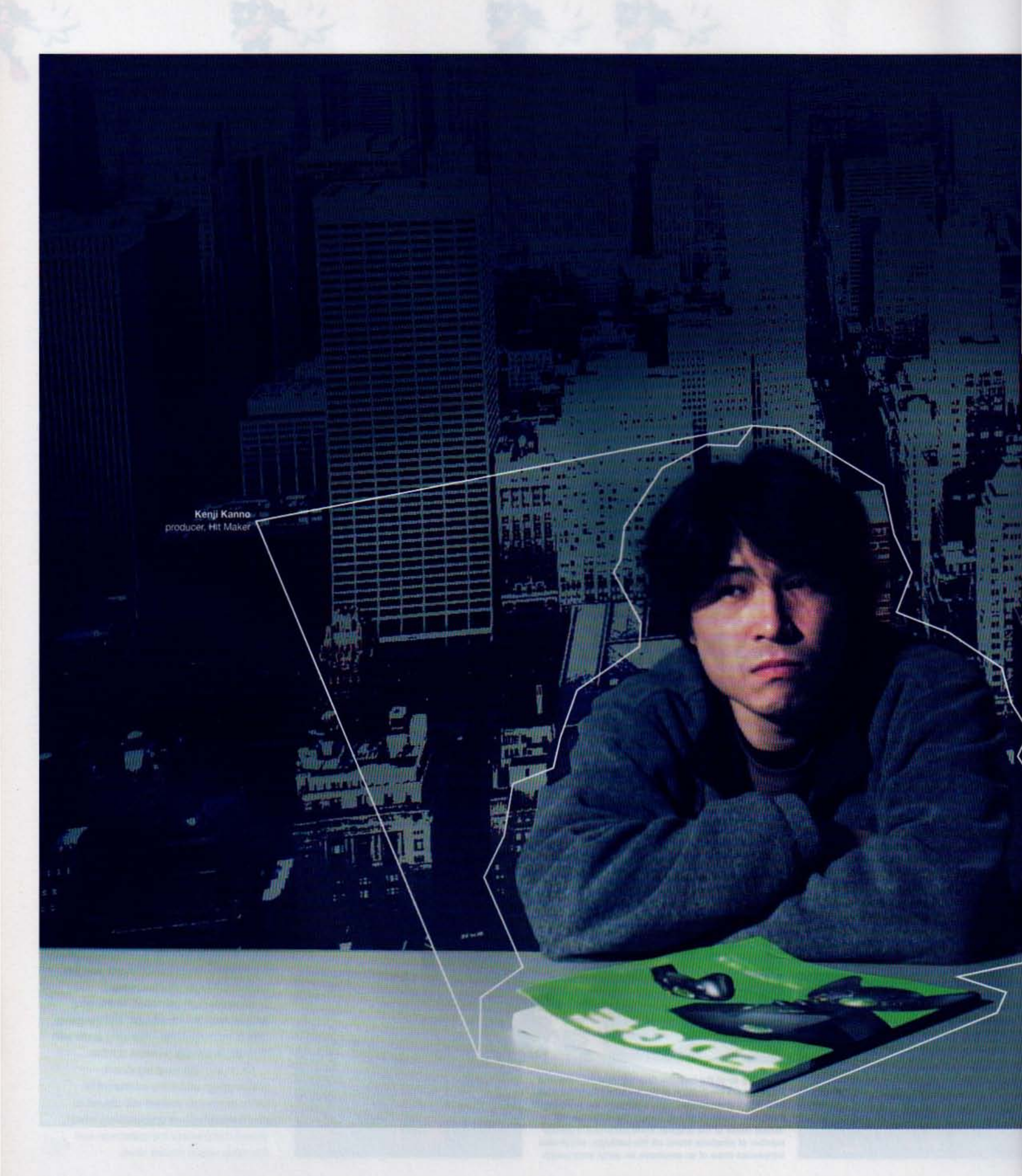


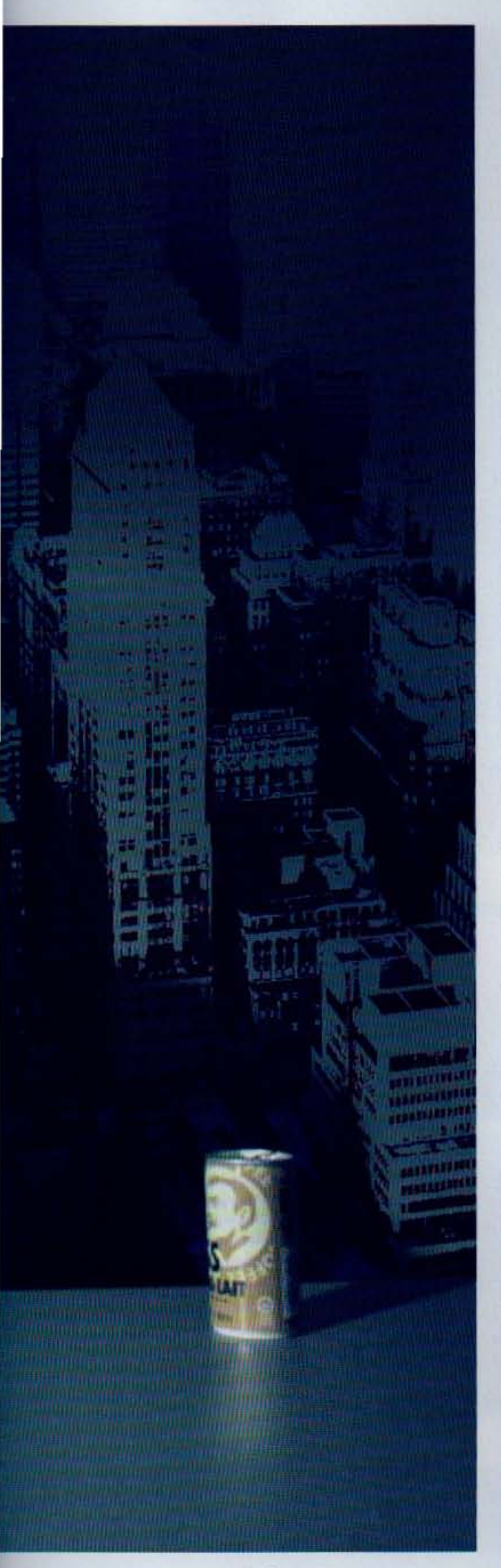
Retaining all of the features that distinguished the first PlayStation2 incarnation of the *Armored Core* franchise, *New Age*'s compatibility with all three of the announced thirdparty modems should complement the link-up Versus mode of the original. More parts and a greater number of missions round off the package, which also introduces more of an emphasis on aerial encounters

SCEI's announcement that its broadband strategy will be implemented from the end of 2001 in Japan doesn't appear to have laid to rest concerns about an underdeveloped infrastructure and competing technologies such as cable and ADSL, allowing thirdparty modem manufacturers such as Sunsoft and Omron to step in to the breach with USB PS2-compatible devices. While Square has notably decided not to include online compatibility in *Final Fantasy X*, From Software is keen to enter the online arena with another PS2 outing for the *Armored Core* series.

More of an update than a sequel, *New Age* keeps the central components of the franchise intact, so while graphics and environments look marginally superior to *Armored Core 2*, the interface remains unchanged, and the focus is still firmly on the strategic customisation of your robot. To this end, 26 new parts are introduced, and the game boasts more missions – including some with a greater emphasis on aerial combat.

Of course, the most significant improvement will be the addition of an online mode that enables two players to play competitively or cooperatively, which should complement the splitscreen and link cable versus modes nicely.


Kenji Kanno
producer, Hit Maker
EDGE



CrazyTaxi 2

Having given fares the fear in an approximation of San Francisco, the opportunity to do the same to the inhabitants of the Big Apple has arrived. Welcome to the rooftop-hopping madness that is Hit Maker's latest creation

Kenji Kanno is confused. Specifically, the *Crazy Taxi* series producer is at a loss to explain the continuing acclaim for his first cabbie venture: "I'm told all the time that it's great, but I have to confess that I do not understand why. I'll admit it's very pleasant, but I find it difficult to appreciate *Crazy Taxi*'s level of success. I'm very happy, of course, but I sometimes get the feeling that it isn't true and that maybe it's only the result of too much hype."

Edge certainly thinks the game is an excellent arcade production whose transition to the home removed a little of its appeal – once in the living room, the game's overall structural elements failed to adapt as well as when powered by a Naomi board, although no one would dispute the fact that it remains, overall, a solid game. This discrepancy, given that *Crazy Taxi 2* has been specifically designed for the Dreamcast (no coin-op version is planned), shouldn't affect its sequel. Of course, that doesn't necessarily mean the game isn't altered in other ways.

Forsaking the arcade

"The game stage is very complex and needs to be played a way that would be impossible in the arcade," Kanno-san reasons. "I mean, players will have to spend time on *Crazy Taxi 2* in order to explore it, discover the stage structure, and learn it, so it can only be played at home. In the arcade [version of *Crazy Taxi*], you were able to get the fun from the very beginning. This time, it's a little bit different."

It's this alteration in the play mechanics that eventually convinced





At the time of writing, the development cycle is some 60 per cent complete, with the title expected to hop its way into Japan's currently struggling videogame stores sometime during this spring

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Hit Maker**
Release: **Q2 (Japan)**
Origin: **Japan**

Photography: **Hiroki Izumi**





Four new cars (and cabbies, obviously) have replaced the previous quartet as the Hit Maker team felt the latter's east coast look was understandably inappropriate for the console-only, New York-inspired sequel



Hit Maker warns over-expectant players that Crazy Taxi's sequel will not deliver the next DC visual revolution – gameplay is very much first and foremost for the developer. Of course, graphical tweaks have been (and continue to be) made





the 15-strong team (half of which worked on *Crazy Taxi*, mainly as programmers) to opt for a home-format-only for the sequel. That's not to say everything has started from scratch – for the past eight months the team has been busy tweaking the original's game engine – but naturally there have been substantial alterations. San Francisco has been replaced by New York, so gone are all of the Californian cars and characters, replaced by east coast counterparts.

"One big difference is at the control level," Nakko-san says of *Crazy Taxi 2*'s new quartet of cabs. "The taxi cars are based on those of '60s and '70s America, and I want players to feel the low rider experience."



As with its predecessor, the team felt no need to visit the actual location for the game's visual inspiration, preferring instead to remain in their Tokyo office, armed with numerous videos and photographs from which to extract the necessary references for capturing the city's distinctive atmosphere

Scaling skyscrapers

Presumably that's low rider as in vehicles equipped with hydraulic suspension arms that allow cars to hop their way across Tarmac as if in the midst of the automotive equivalent of an epileptic seizure, and the transport of choice of gang members, rappers, chicanos, and the US equivalent of British Nova GTE drivers.

"Yes, let's make the cars hop – in many ways these are jumps – you're you going to fly," enthuses the producer. "So that will change the gameplay." Kanno-san is also keen to provide what he terms a "true 3D experience" as opposed to *Crazy Taxi*, which he feels delivers something "still very 2D." By this, he doesn't mean the actual game was two dimensional, obviously. Rather, he's referring to the new 'flying' ability of the sequel's cab fleet, and the extra dynamic he firmly believes this brings to the game's mechanics.

When you combine this hopping ability with the Big Apple's skyscrapers, you get some interesting results. As such, expect rooftops to provide the setting for some of the game's tracks – getting there requires the exploration Kanno-san mentioned earlier. Ultimately, although the developer initially worried about the change of setting, the team quickly set about finding ways of maximising the potential for fun. Flying cars and building hopping are part of the plan.

As is your taxi's ability to pick up multiple fares. Up to four pedestrians can take their chances and ride with



The 'flying experience', as *CT2* producer Kenji Kanno refers to it, is the team's favourite aspect of this sequel. It's one of several features to have yet to be finalised, however





The hardest element surrounding *CT2*'s development, according to the game's producer, was the balance between retaining the spirit of the original game while also including sufficient new features so as to make sure the game is a worthy update



Surprisingly, Kanno-san doesn't play games at home – he prefers to look after his bitch, which was to give birth to a litter of puppies when **Edge** interviewed the *CT2* producer

"At Hit Maker, we do not care about beautiful graphics. I mean, we don't focus our resources and efforts on this issue. Of course, we work to achieve an overall good level of quality, but our main concern, certainly, is to deliver a new experience, an original concept. It's our style"

you, and if nothing else this should contribute significantly in terms of making things especially frantic. But if, gameplay-wise, things appear to be undergoing the expected evolutionary changes, visually *Crazy Taxi 2* looks like it's throwing around a strangely similar amount of polygons to its predecessor. The reason is, frankly, refreshing.







Hitting the original concept

"At Hit Maker, we do not care about beautiful graphics," states Kanno-san. "I mean, we don't focus our resources and efforts on this issue. Of course, we work to achieve an overall good level of quality, but our main concern, certainly, is to deliver a new experience, an original concept. It's our style – graphics are made to reinforce the quality of the original game concept. Unlike other [developers], we're not trying to get people's attention with the graphical level. That's simply not how we work.

"For *Crazy Taxi 2*, you could think the graphics haven't changed, in many ways, but we've added many details and we're still working hard on it. So the final version may, in fact, turn out to have a far better graphical level than the previous *Crazy Taxi*. However, I don't think people will find this sequel visually very different from the first one."

However, as Kanno-san points out, as long as the playing experience is strong, then visual improvements matter little. After all, the majority of the most recent Dreamcast titles have attained a graphical level that is wholly compelling – **Edge** would argue that the likes of *Virtua Tennis*, *F355 Challenge*, or *PSO* wouldn't necessarily gain much at all from prettier visuals. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see what the team could do on a different platform, particularly now, as Sega has withdrawn from the hardware race. Yet Hit Maker's approach to new hardware is identical to its aversion of aesthetics. Ask Kanno-san about possible *Crazy Taxi 2* conversions and you get a predictable reply: "Well, I do not know yet. I would do it if I can get more players to enjoy *Crazy Taxi* as a gaming experience. However, I'm not inclined to make a straightforward conversion or move to a given console because it happens to be the current trend – I prefer to design something new, taking full advantage of a console."

Furthermore, Hit Maker has made it clear that it will not be converting past hits to other platforms unless specifically instructed to do so by the head of Sega.

No taxi competition

Returning to *Crazy Taxi 2*, unfortunately the game will not make use of the Dreamcast modem. While the prospect of multiplayer taxi action,



Second time around, cars have inherited the 'hopping' ability offered by the hydraulic suspension of low riders, while also allowing you to carry a maximum of four passengers – a recipe for trouble







With a New York setting, the streets should be a little more hectic. But then there's always the option of avoiding the rush-hour traffic by making your way across the top of the skyscrapers trapping ordinary vehicles. Of course, you'll have to find a way to get that high – it's all part of the exploration required in *CT2*, a feature Hit Maker is keen to emphasise as one of the ways this differs from the original game







with drivers fighting over potential passengers, is appealing, Hit Maker feels things could get a little too confusing and the game would suffer as a result. But above all, with the game's domestic release just around the corner, there simply isn't enough time to implement such a feature. Also, don't expect your VMU to perform any spectacular tricks, as no special use for this add-on is planned.

Opening a new Crazy Box

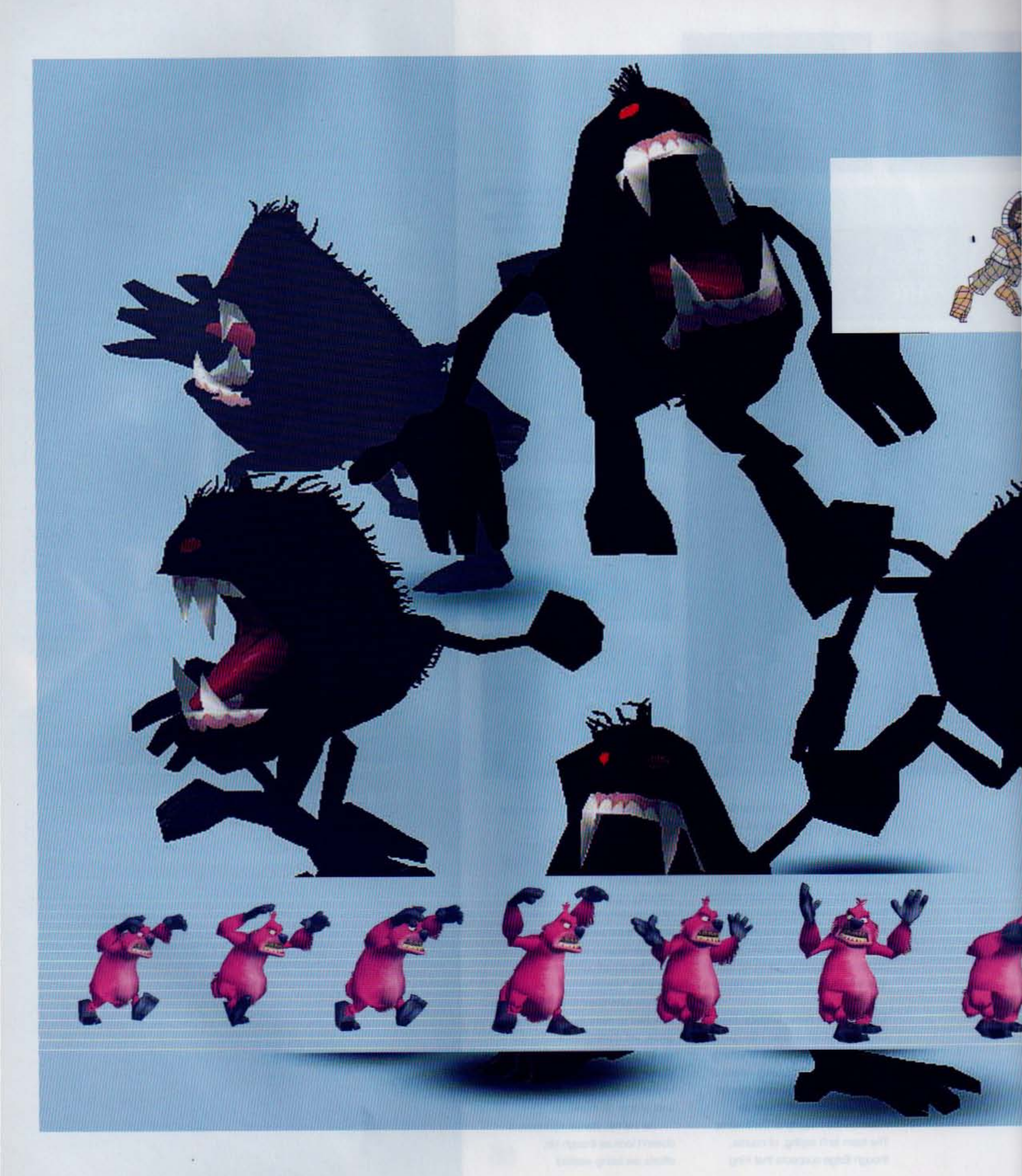
On a more positive note, mini-games make a return. At the time of writing, Hit Maker is still discussing details of possible ideas for inclusion, though expect the New York theme to influence the majority of the finalists. The team isn't saying, of course, though **Edge** suspects that King Kong or Godzilla could make some form of appearance.

Ultimately, then, there are no massive alterations to report. *Crazy Taxi 2*, though clearly evolved, naturally represents an extension of its predecessor. For Kanno-san and his team the process has been particularly stressful.

"I have been under a lot of pressure," admits the producer. "People who loved *Crazy Taxi* are very attached to many features of the game, yet making something too similar would not give the sequel any flavour. So the question is, 'Can I go forward?' or, 'When do I stop?' I spent a lot of time on this issue."

As the title stands right now, it doesn't look as though his efforts are being wasted.

"I would consider a conversion to another format if that means getting more players to enjoy the *Crazy Taxi* experience, but I'd prefer to design something new, taking full advantage of a console"



Herdy Gerdy

The next generation of PlayStation2 visuals is (nearly) here. And accompanying it is an equally compelling, innovative gameplay motif. Edge meets its makers, a team oddly reluctant to hype one of the most promising titles in recent years





As **Edge** discovered when it first caught a glimpse of *Herdy Gerdy* (**E**85), the team responsible for the title is reluctant to succumb to marketing machine hype. Then, as now, the team was hesitant to offer the usual hyperbole to the extent that it is still difficult to secure screenshots. This is all the more unusual for a title that, even at this early stage, looks like offering some evidence beyond *Metal Gear Solid 2* of the sort of quality that the maturing PlayStation2 platform is set to receive. Indeed, if the team gets things right with the game's Disney-esque environment, in which seemingly prerendered backgrounds develop into fully explorable 3D landscapes, gamers could be in for the sort of revelatory exploration that characterised the original *Tomb Raider* before such memories became sullied by its less revolutionary sequels.

Although the visual style of the game clearly owes a debt to conventional animation techniques, it is on a wholly separate evolutionary branch to the cel-shaded likes of *Jet Set Radio*, or even the PS2 incarnation of *Fur Fighters*. Instead, the reason that apparently prerendered backgrounds can be explored in three dimensions is down to a particularly meticulous approach taken by the team, which bodes well for the title. But in taking its visual cue from the hand-drawn Disney style, the game has a unique selling point that is potentially a double-edged sword, as Core's **Adrian Smith** explains: "People might misunderstand the game's style, but it's this style, this look, this feel, that I actually think people will get really absorbed in. I'll





The game's Disney-esque appearance, which might suggest that it is aimed at the 'kiddie' demographic, belies mature gameplay mechanics, which hark back to old-school gaming

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Eidos Interactive**
Developer: **Core Design**
Release: **Q4 2001**
Origin: **UK**

Photography: **Martin Thompson**





Reminiscent of handpainted cel animation and suggestive of rendered backgrounds, these shots actually portray environments that are completely 3D, which can be navigated by the eponymous Herdy Gerdy


Clint Nembhard
producer
Chris Long
team leader
Paul Harrison
level designer

go to see a Disney movie, and it's not just to take the kids, it's because they're great movies. Similarly, I think the game mechanics of *Gerdy* are mature."

Perhaps the mainstream consumer will be confused by a style that normally suggests a 'kiddie' product, but despite the current industry climate of tried and tested genres, *Herdy Gerdy* combines some stunningly stylised environments with some equally idiosyncratic gameplay principles. Which in some ways harks back to the likes of *Iridis Alpha*, when codeshops were more adventurous. "Chris Long, the team leader, has been with us since the company started and he's a real old gamer," explains Smith. "I think that's really important, because I think all these new people in the industry are great, but mixing old game hands with new blood is really important." Certainly when it comes to retaining the integrity and simplicity of the console dynamic. "Something we've found in this building which is quite interesting is that there are quite a few people saying, 'Just because we've got a really powerful machine in the PS2 now, why do we have to create these huge, complex games that require 20 fingers and four hours to learn the basic control mechanism?' We've got a load of people here who just want to make a game that feels really good on a console. And I think we've achieved that. We've created this look, this world, this feel. Everything is consistent within that world."



Each level contains 100 bells for Gerdy to collect, granting him new items or unlocking cheat codes. These won't all be accessible at the first attempt, with certain items needing to be unlocked first, granting the game a certain amount of replayability and adding a hint of platforming style

Upon first glance, the game itself superficially resembles a 3D platformer along the lines of *Mario* on the N64 – indeed, it originally started life as a design document for that platform before Sony stepped in. But appearances can be deceiving, and the gameplay that will appear in the finished product is admirably original. As the spelling of the title suggests, the core mechanic is that of herding a series of creatures. So far so simple, and in early levels this is as complex as the action gets in order to gently introduce players to the control mechanism and play dynamic. But a relatively simple ecosystem containing a whole food chain complicates matters somewhat. Trying to steer two different sets of animals that prey on each other, for example, promises to offer mindachingly exacting challenges. As do levels that maximise the particular eccentricities of these creatures – such as a labyrinthine coliseum level or organic bee hive. Throw in some staggeringly huge levels, including one which sees the eponymous hero working his way from a summer valley to snowy mountain tops, and a raft of platform style power-ups and bonuses (there are 100 bells to collect in each area to unlock items and cheat codes), and there is a beguiling level of complexity underlying a simple interface.



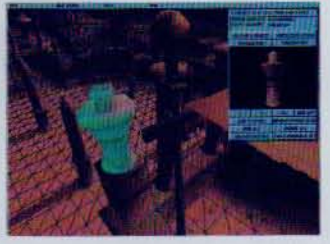
Initial levels are intentionally simple, so players can get used to the game mechanics, but later levels introduce a wider range of fauna, introducing conflicting – and often stupid – behaviour

Artists roam free

In order to realise this vision, team leader **Chris Long** and the other

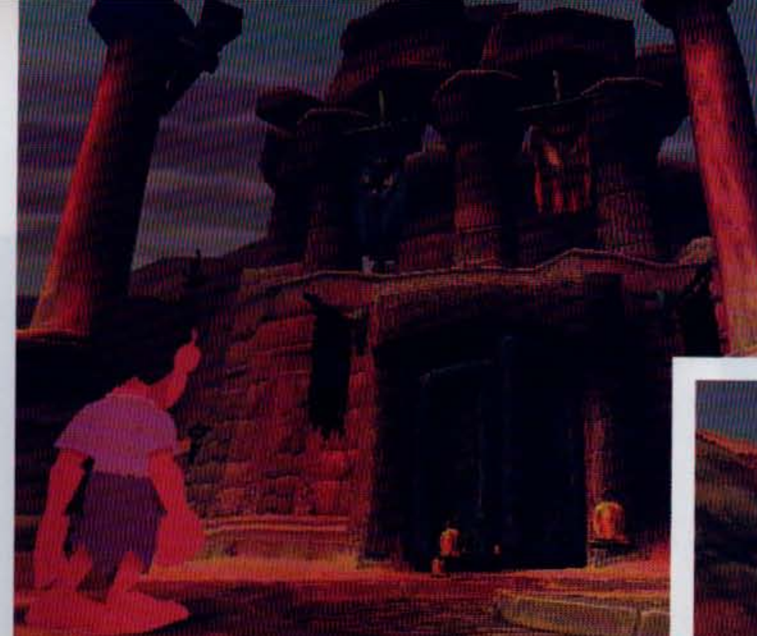






For the benefit of any doubters, these shots of the game's level editor show that there really is a polygonal structure behind the title's seemingly prerendered facades

Adrian Smith
operations director



As well as an innovative gameplay dynamic and the inclusion of platform-style power-ups, the game also incorporates an epic narrative which sees Gerdy mature from a cocksure youth

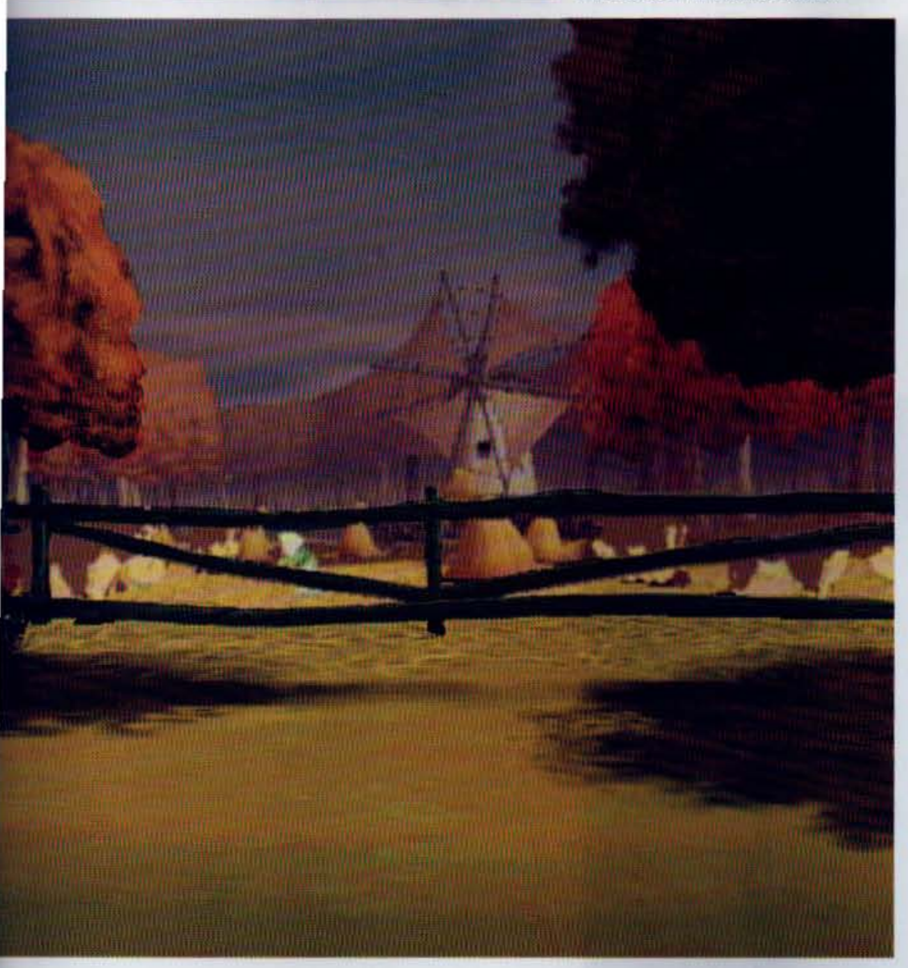
programmers have given themselves quite a headache. Because, quite simply, they've given the artists and level designers as much free reign as they need to get the game right. "This is the first step in it being different," Long explains when pressed for a simple reason as to why the game seems such a leap ahead of the first wave of PlayStation2 software. "Part of the reason is the way we approach doing the backgrounds. Normally in a game when you start writing the background system you would do something based upon grids or viewing portals, or something like that, which is essentially restrictive for the artists. What we said from the outset is that we don't really want to do that, so the artists can build whatever they want in the background. If they need more detail here, there, or whatever, they can do that." Cue hand-drawn textures, separately modelled flowers and bullrushes, and a cast of background characters that are as detailed as the game's protagonist. "There are absolutely no restrictions on the artists. Whatever they do, the game engine has to cope with, so it's up to us as programmers to make it work. Which is a lot of work for us, but it gives a different look to the game – it's more freeform." Indeed, pointing to a fence in a bee-hive level, he offers further clarification: "Normally in a game with a fence like that, developers will just put a flat poly down and texture it as a fence, which is okay until you get close to it. But what we've done is actually use a 3D fence made out of objects, so when you get close to it, it doesn't look naff. So it's an attention-to-detail thing, where we try and restrict the amount of corners we cut and try to go that extra yard."

While it might be tough for the team, this has forced Core's programmers to quietly get on with the task of taking advantage of the PlayStation2 architecture, rather than just griping about it. "The PlayStation2 really does punish you. If you don't do it the way it likes it done, the penalty is enormous. So we've spent a lot of time organising our data so that the whole thing goes through on to the DMA pipeline as fast as possible without fiddling around with it and without spreading the whole bit through the various bits of memory. The data has to be grouped together so that it can be cached and put straight through on to the DMA and it just runs faster that way. And one of the last things that we have to do that on is the animation system, which is our bottleneck at the moment. But we're working through that." Given the impressive results achieved to date, it would be difficult to doubt

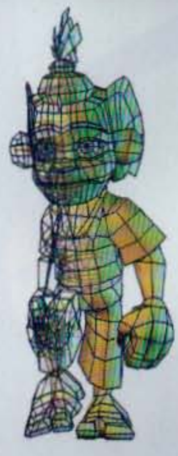
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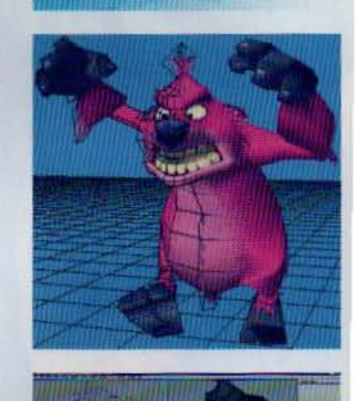


In contrast to the first wave of PS2 titles, the *Herdy Gerdy* team is using a texture-management system to capitalise on the perhaps the machine's biggest asset – its speed. In this manner it hopes to avoid the sorts of problems that less industrious or deadline-strapped developers have had with the oft-criticised lack of visual memory, enabling use of hand-painted textures









As with every aspect of the game, there is an inordinate amount of detailed attention being lavished upon getting the look and feel of the game's characters correct

the team's ability to do so.

Corralling new techniques

One of the areas that impresses most – particularly given the apparent difficulty that early PS2 titles have had with limited video memory – is in its use of textures. Again, this is due to the programmers methodically working to the platform's strengths, as Long explains: "The thing about the PS2 is that you can actually download an enormous amount of textures as you need them, so you can store them in main memory and download them. We've got loads of video memory left because we're just downloading them as required. The DMA's so fast that it just doesn't matter. It's an extremely fast machine when it comes to the DMA part, and it's extremely flexible. It's a lot of work and fiddly, and it's extremely difficult to debug if it's not working, but once you've got it working it's fine."

Another technique that's being used to ensure the visual superiority of *Herdy Gerdy* is rendering the display in a higher resolution before shrinking it down to achieve an antialiased effect. As Long points out, though, this method wouldn't suit every genre: "It wouldn't suit a science-fiction game for example. It's just a slightly different way of going about things. The reason for doing it is because of the final look that we want to achieve. We're trying to soften the whole display and remove the polygons and sharp edges, which are particularly bad on PS2 games." While the screenshots on these pages give some indication of what gamers can expect when the title is launched at the end of this year, there are effects yet to be added. Long: "We've got an area of video memory that we can reduce or expand for the texture manager, which increases or decreases with performance. At the moment it's got quite a substantial amount, but we've got quite a big buffer at the end which we need for the special effects that go over the top. We've got to put in the particle system for spray off waterfalls and various cloud effects when he's running on the floor and things like that."

So, despite the finished look of the title, sizeable elements remain to be incorporated and optimised. But, as Smith points out, Core currently has the unusual luxury of having



enough time to tweak the game, combined with a rigorous evaluation department: "That is a luxury that we maybe haven't had enough of in the past – way back until the original *Tomb Raider*, I suppose." And, talking of *Tomb Raider*, Smith is also keen to highlight the fact that some members of the company's ten-strong playtesting team have been around since the beginning: "They play a massive role. They're actually the most important people in this building, because without them the game doesn't get released. We use our own guys because they know the teams, they're involved in the project from the beginning to the end, they sit in on a lot of meetings and understand the design and what we want to do. And they're well respected by the teams." Which is why **Edge** is as confident as it can be (given the vagaries of development) that the company is going to get things right with *Herdy Gerdy*.

Despite strong signs that the title ranks as one of the more reassuring prospects set to appear on Sony's hardware, the development team is keen to remain humble. "It's extremely difficult to develop on a machine when the machine itself is still being developed," states Long, "which I imagine was the case for the first wave of [PS2] software. Probably what they did was to download all the textures before the level starts, so there's no texture management system. So all their textures for a whole level have to fit into a section of video memory, and once that's filled they can't do anything about it. For us, it's all taken care of on the DMA chain." Nevertheless, he does acknowledge a difference in approach towards the way his team is developing for PlayStation2: "I see it as a twofold difference. The first thing is the way we approach the graphics, allowing the artists a large degree of freedom, which is bad for us as programmers – immensely bad. And the other difference is perhaps that we approach the way we do it on the PS2 slightly differently, in that we've tried to organise our data correctly and make sure it's right." Which didn't go entirely smoothly. "Admittedly, when we first did it it wasn't right, so we just had to go through the pain of reorganising it and getting it right. But at the end of the day you've got to do that if you want your game to stand out. To be fair to the people that wrote the first wave of software, I think they were up against it, deadline-wise. I think they had really tight deadlines. Over the coming months I think you'll see a dramatic improvement in the quality of PS2 software." Starting, if all goes according to plan, with *Herdy Gerdy*.



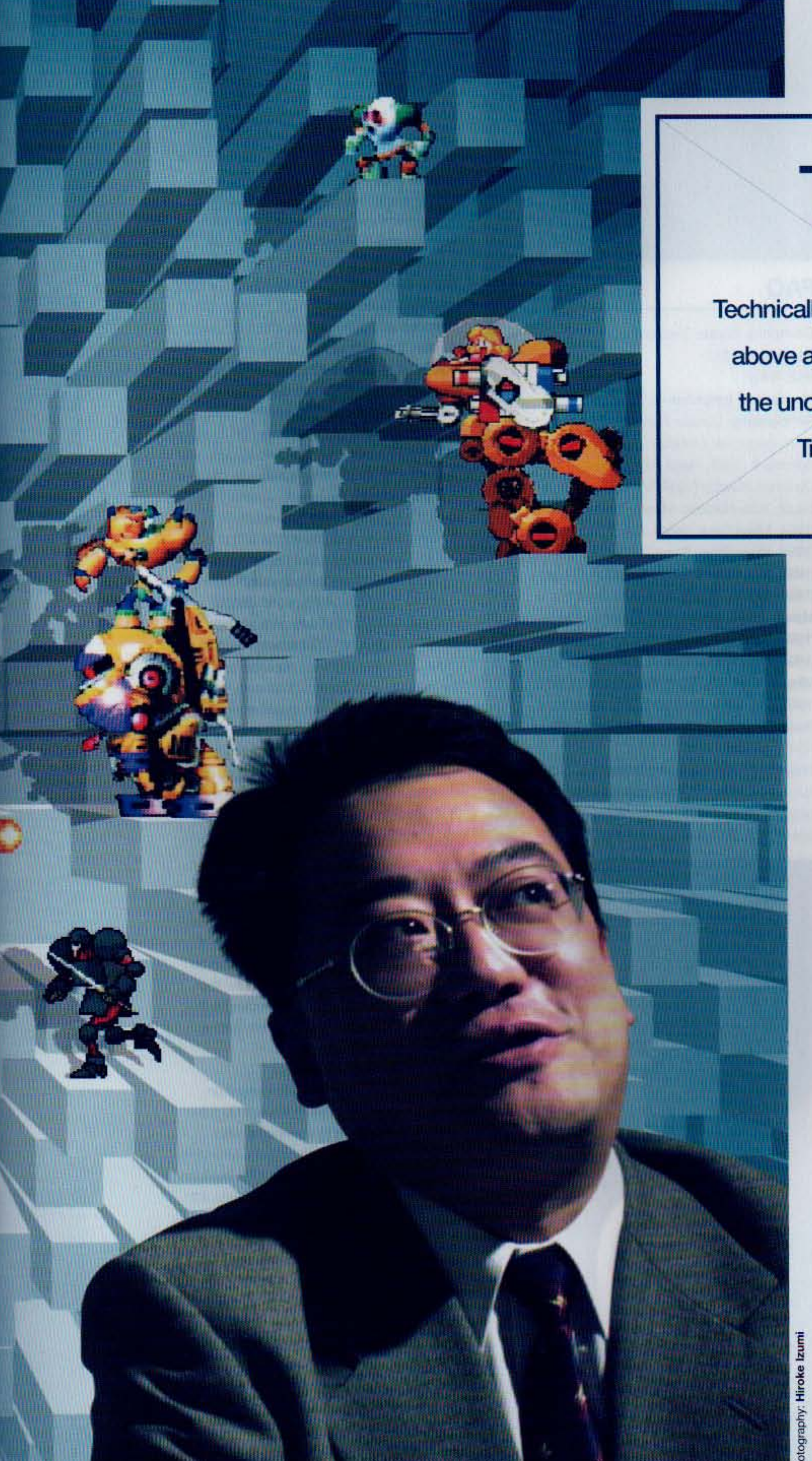
Long, Nembhard and Harrison may be the leads on *Herdy Gerdy*, but ops director Adrian Smith believes Core's evaluation department to be its most important asset











Photography: **Hiroke Izumi**

Inside...

Treasure

Technically proficient, remarkably playable but above all, exhaustively original. Step inside the uncommonly inventive territory that is Treasure's videogaming world

Masato **Maegawa** is CEO of one of Japan's most consistent and inventive videogame developing outfits. Having begun his videogaming career in 1989 as a programmer at Konami, working on the revered *Dracula Densetsu* for the Game Boy, Maegawa-san soon grew tired of the sequel mentality that began to colour his employer's approach, and left the likes of Hideo Kojima with a team of likeminded Konami personnel to found his own company.

Treasure is now in its ninth year. Located just outside Tokyo's centre in Nishi-Shinjuku, the business's unassuming edifice houses 30 developers with notable backgrounds – some developed the original *Castlevania* for Super Famicom, for example – who, as a rule, form three teams working on different projects simultaneously. Adhering to this approach, Treasure has appeared regularly on the videogaming shop shelves ever since its first title, Mega Drive *Gunstar Heroes*, in 1993. On most occasions, it has also shamed developers five or six times its size by offering titles with unrivalled playability and technical aplomb.

Original

Despite the company's success, its raison d'être remains the wonderfully revivifying originality its titles tend to harness. Maegawa-san is adamant that this is the direct result of the company's ideology, which remains intact.

"I built this small company based on the following idea: let's make the original games we want to create," he says. "Treasure is, in fact, a gathering of creators who are working on their own. It is quite simple: we create original action games and put them on the market. It is how we work. Our mission statement is 'Original Action Games'."

You couldn't necessarily pick another three words that would better define Treasure's output. Normally surrounded by clichéd shooter material from fellow developers, Treasure games



FAQ

Company name: Treasure
Founded: 1992
HQ: Tokyo
Number of employees: 30
Softography: *Gunstar Heroes* (1993, Mega Drive, Sega); *Mc Donald's Treasureland Adventure* (1993, Mega Drive, Sega); *Dynamite Headdy* (1994, Mega Drive, Sega); *YuYu Hakusho Makyo Tohitsusen* (1994, Mega Drive, Sega); *Alien Soldier* (1995, Mega Drive, Sega); *Light Crusader* (1995, Mega Drive, Sega); *Guardian Heroes* (1996, Saturn, Sega); *Yuke Yuke Trouble Makers* (1997, N64, Enix); *Silhouette Mirage* (1997, Saturn, Treasure); *Radiant Silvergun* (1998, arcade ST-V/Saturn, ESP); *Silhouette Mirage* (1998, PS, ESP); *Rakugaki Showtime* (1999, PS, ESP); *Bangaio* (1999, N64/DC, Treasure/ESP); *Sin And Punishment* (2000, N64, Treasure)
Projects in development: Treasure is currently working on three new console projects, though legal matters currently prevent it from revealing any details.

effortlessly stand out from the crowd, offering an approach on well-established genres that eschew tradition to a remarkable degree. This, Maegawa-san explains, is largely due to the competition falling prey to the pressures involving the increased commercialism of the videogame scene.

"I think that in this industry there are many, many creators who design with a lot of passion," he concedes, "but, in reality, few are the ones who can really express their passion. I mean, it is a job as well, so the business part has to be taken into account. As the business part gains more and more importance, it gets harder to create what you want."

Getting the balance between the business and creative factions is the delicate part, but this is something that Maegawa-san believes his company has managed, allowing it the enviable freedom to create precisely what it wants. Which is simply a reflection of a development process that has remained constant throughout the company's history.

"We organise meetings and discuss a concept, trying to find very original ideas about it," Treasure's CEO reveals. "In many companies now there are separate sections for designers, musicians, producers, or programmers. We prefer to gather everybody in a single meeting so that they can react to somebody's idea or link their own together.

"We gather and express our ideas, our concepts and the company is here to make them become reality. It is as simple as that. But new ideas or new concepts don't necessarily result in great gameplay – it is also a question of balance. So in Treasure's case, we put as many new ideas and concepts into well balanced games before releasing them on to the market. However, we don't consider ourselves exceptional as there are really many ideas out there – the only difference with [other developers] is that we are able to implement ours into games."

Uncompromising

It's this ability to implement innovation so convincingly that makes Treasure's life rather easy when it comes to meeting up with potential publishers for its projects. Maegawa-san admits representatives from the publisher follow the development process closely, with meetings occurring on a regular basis, but that this practice is far from restrictive.

"In the case of Nintendo or Sega," he cites as an example, "we bring them a very carefully and well-designed project. We have never been asked to take out something we wanted to include in a game. In that sense, we are very happy to be able to do what we like."

Which is a good thing, given how Treasure would react to such a request.

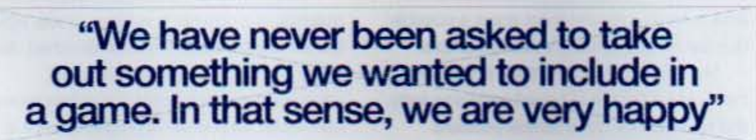
"If it happens one day with a company, we would never work with them again," Maegawa-san states without hesitation. "Nintendo or

Sega knows we have this strict philosophy in our game design, a solid policy we stick to. They trust us about our choices and decisions concerning our projects. We do not make games that we are asked to make – we don't work like this. We bring them one of our projects we feel is great and would fit their platform. Then we ask them if we can do it for them. If it can't be done, the development would never start, but we have not experienced a single disappointment in the past. I guess it is proof that they understand us and the level of our work very well. Just have a look at the content of the games we have made for these great companies – you will instantly understand we really made what we wanted to do, with no concessions."

Judging by its softography, Treasure has certainly wanted to make shoot 'em ups. action and shooting game. We are often told it will become hard for us to survive if we continue in this direction. Well, you know, this market is not that small. I guess it represents something like 50,000 copies. That's not bad at all. If you create something great, you know that 50,000 people will buy your game. I think this kind of business is okay."

Misunderstood

This is the fundamental principle behind Treasure. You get the feeling that the team members genuinely aren't in it for the yen. Clearly they make a living – everyone has to – but their approach centres around the game first, and finances very much second. Interestingly, *Gunstar Heroes* may have sold 300,000 units worldwide and encouraged the most consumer response, but *Yuke Yuke*



"We have never been asked to take out something we wanted to include in a game. In that sense, we are very happy"

That's not to say its creative abilities haven't ventured outside this realm (*Gunbeat*, an arcade-style racing game, reached a considerably advanced stage, but the project was suspended after the team found the gameplay unsatisfying), but the shooting genre is a trend running through the vast majority of its titles. Why such a focused approach?

"Inside Treasure, many of us want to develop shooting games," he explains. "I mean, only a shoot 'em up can give you real excitement, get your hands sweaty. RPGs or simulations are also interesting, but, since the early videogaming days, action and shooting games have been the essence [of electronic entertainment] – they are the foundations of videogames. No other type of game would create these feelings inside you and make you cry, 'Ghaaagh – this is it'."

However, essence of videogaming or not, some would argue that the shoot 'em up audience has suffered in recent times. Maegawa-san is quick to disagree.

"If you consider the shooting game market, there are in reality more fans than people would think," he retorts. "Of course, the market is far smaller than for RPGs. However, shooting fans – or 'shooters' – are quite large in number, and if you deliver something polished for these people, you will get good sales in return. So we are developing our shooting or action projects carefully with lots of attention to detail and creativity for this audience."

Any discernible shift in Treasure's approach at this stage would appear unlikely. "There are many popular trends at this moment like music or card games," says Maegawa-san. "Nevertheless, we prefer to focus on what we think is the essence of the videogame – an

Trouble Makers on N64 has been the company's most successful global release. Other titles may have enjoyed even greater success, were it not for Treasure's tendency to not make games officially available outside of its native land. However, it seems that this hasn't always been the company's decision.

"I would like this game to go overseas but it appears that outside Japan, line-ups are full so there is to be no place for *Sin And Punishment*," Maegawa-san shockingly reveals, while retaining a rather diplomatic attitude. Videogame marketing appears to be far from an exact science.

Regardless, Treasure has never been about topping the charts, and despite some competition-beating titles, Maegawa-san remains philosophical rather than frustrated at the unjust sales figures.

"We don't make sequels or character based games," he says. "If sales are not as big as people could expect for our titles, well, I can't do anything. Our best sales ever were 500,000 units. I don't think we will ever reach the million mark. If we really wanted to become a million seller, then we would have oriented our development in a way more, you know, suitable from a business perspective. We don't want that. When you have a good-selling title, you can decide to make a sequel, but in order to make it even better than the first version you will need an enormous budget, great marketing resources, etc. We do not work like this. When we start a project we do not think we will sell millions of units. We work to not disappoint our fans, the people who buy our games. So, compared to companies which aim at million-unit sales, I have to say we are very different."





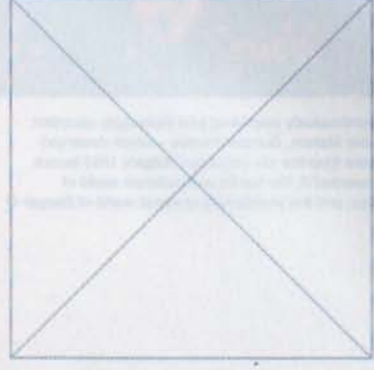




From top: the continuously surprising and thoroughly excellent *Yuke Yuke Trouble Makers*, *Gunstar Heroes* – which deserved considerably more than the 'six out of ten' Edge's 1993 launch editorial team awarded it, the frantic and polished world of *Silhouette Mirage*, and the wonderfully abstract world of *Bangai-O*





Treasure may not have adopted the sequel mentality in the past, but rumours have recently circulated within the industry and among fans of a possible set of follow-ups, particularly to *Radiant Silvergun* and *Gunstar Heroes*. The latter, specifically, was thought to be in development. Sadly, Maegawa-san denies any such plans.

"Well, it's not that we don't want to make a [*Gunstar Heroes*] sequel, but rather that we cannot make one. There are few reasons why: as CEO of the company, I could say (to my teams) 'Okay, let's do it!', but that would be only motivated by the business side. However, if some of my creators come to see me one day saying 'Okay, let's make the sequel!', and that with the following features we will make it even better than the previous version', then, yes, I would gather a team and start the development. In fact, within Treasure we have already spoken several times about a possible *Gunstar Heroes 2*, but it is not that simple.

"Among the problems, there is the fact that *Gunstar Heroes* achieved great popularity, and we would be under terrible pressure. When we released *Gunstar Heroes*, the game was complete. Making the same game but with better graphics would be complete nonsense. If you were to determine the difference between the first and the second *Gunstar Heroes*, it would be vital that the latter should have something extraordinary to offer. We would have to work very, very hard to achieve that. Now, if you managed to include great new features in the second version, it may not be a *Gunstar* game any more. I think this aspect is very sensitive. Furthermore, to develop the sequel I need the very same team to take it in charge. That is not an easy thing inside Treasure."

Later, Maegawa-san eventually agrees that while he states Treasure doesn't venture into the sequel kingdom, given the right project his teams could indeed develop successors to past IPs. Nevertheless, for now the CEO isn't saying which titles could qualify. So, which of his creations is he proudest of?

"I couldn't choose one, since I put a lot of affection in to each title developed here," he says non-committedly, before a little more thought. "When I founded the company, *Gunstar Heroes* certainly became our flagship title. And, in addition, I would say *Sin And Punishment* as it is the latest title we developed so the memories are still fresh. We really worked hard on this game. It is the very first time we have released a 3D title – 2D has been a long tradition at Treasure, but we have to go 3D as it is now the standard. So, *Sin And Punishment* is very important in that sense, as it is the first of its kind in our company."

If picking a personal favourite is not so clear cut, perhaps remembering which produced the biggest development headaches is an easier task. After all, Treasure has a reputation for getting seemingly tone deaf and rhythmically challenged hardware to perform some rather impressive song and dance routines. The answer is even less specific.

"Each one," exclaims a smiling Maegawa-san. "We confront so many technical difficulties during each development that it would also be very hard to pick up one title among the others. And, as consoles are getting more powerful, it is more difficult to get an idea of what we can achieve. On the Mega Drive, I think we nearly reached the limit of the machine. But on PS2, it is nearly impossible to see what it can do. I don't know of a single company that can appreciate and use the full potential of this console. I guess in four or five years we may know how to use it, but in the meantime new consoles will be released and you'll have to start research from square one.

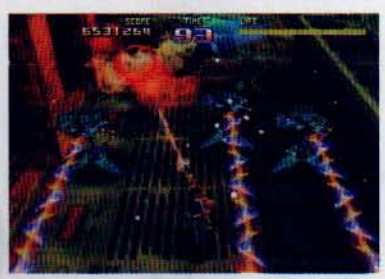
"I think it looks impossible to use the full potential of a console nowadays. I really would like for new consoles not to be launched. As game creators, we would like time to understand and appreciate a machine so we can deliver. Of course, as programmers it is always a joy to explore new boundaries, new architecture. But in the case of PS2, you would be so busy trying to see what kind of stuff you can do, and how you would do it that you would be unable to think creation. By this I mean that technical research would cost you 70 per cent of your time or resources. So yes, game creation is going to suffer."

At least Maegawa-san remains more optimistic about the crisis currently affecting the Japanese videogaming community, and his views echo those NCL president, Hiroshi





Treasure's latest and one of its greatest. The company's first foray into real 3D, *Sin And Punishment* offers superbly balanced gameplay







Yamauchi, has been airing recently: "I think there are too many developers on the market. I mean, ten years ago when there were around ten titles each month, everybody was able to enjoy the market. Now, we are talking about hundreds of titles each month. Some companies will sell a lot while others not. And, as the number of companies in the latter category is increasing, people are then saying: 'That's it, the market is going down'. However, if you consider the annual sales figures you'll see the market is developing, growing. So yes, the market is dividing into two distinct categories: one which sells, and another not."

The technically astounding *Radiant Silvergun*: eBay favourite and widely regarded as one of the best shoot 'em ups known to videogamers

Committed

Predictably, for a company whose approach has always been about the games, this situation doesn't phase its CEO. "I believe that if you develop carefully, putting a lot of attention into your creation, users will follow you – there is no doubt about that," Maegawa-san says confidently. "In the past, the situation was ridiculous – whatever you released on the market was almost certain to sell 100,000 copies. Pffff. Now the same companies aren't selling as much and they are complaining about the market. So, yes, I would like to insist on this point: it is important to stick to a policy, a development philosophy. I think the problem is very much located within each company."

Which, conveniently, leads us into Sega's recent decision to pull out of the hardware race. Having spent several years developing for its past consoles on an almost exclusive basis, Maegawa-san believes Treasure and Sonic's stable to have one of the most solid relationships of the development community.

"I really wanted Sega to do better than that," Maegawa says with genuine regret. "As for Dreamcast, I think games will still be released and Sega has the responsibility to follow the platform for one or two more years. But, after four years of deficit, you realise it's difficult to ask them to continue – they have a business to run just like the rest of us. As a hardware manufacturer, they have not been very successful, but as software maker they are incredibly talented. People might say Sega has lost against Sony and Nintendo. But, in reality, as a software company they are the world number one or two. Don't underestimate Sega. They have a great potential."

Which is something Treasure continues to have in abundance. When asked about the future, Maegawa-san affirms his company will carry on as it always has. The action and shoot 'em up genres will remain the outfit's main area of focus, with balanced gameplay and innovative features very much at the forefront.

"I'm attracted by online gaming," Maegawa-san says of a possible future direction for Treasure's creations. "I thought about its viability as a business, but, you know, great games are already on the market – *Ultima Online*, *Everquest*, *Diablo* – it looks like there isn't much left to do. I would like to make something online within Treasure, but it looks difficult as today's network technology isn't good enough to support action or shooting games. There would be too much lag."

Whatever the influences brought on by technological factors, Treasure's core will continue thankfully intact. As one of the depressingly few softcos displaying a passion for development rather than profit, its understanding of gaming remains largely unrivalled.

"The key elements will never change. Popular [gaming] concepts from the Famicom age will remain popular in the future. There is no doubt about this fact. What is fun remains fun," Maegawa-san concludes. Before leaving, however, he adds: "Of course, it should be accompanied with evolution."

Revolution, surely?



XBOX: THE GAMES

To date, the XBox story has proved a compelling one – not least because Microsoft and console-style stability have always been at odds – but it's so far been one of hardware, hardware, hardware. This month, that changes

In this eight-page XBox software feature **Edge** takes a look at four of the first games due to hit the platform when it debuts later this year. Before looking at the titles, though, **Edge** decided to talk to one of the platform's most vocal evangelists, Oddworld Inhabitants' **Lorne Lanning**, who's behind the much-vaunted *Munch's Oddysee*.

Will your first XBox project appear at the time of the system's launch?

Absolutely. We're exclusive on XBox for the next four titles, and we're very excited about that. When we came off PS2, we were so frustrated. Every time you hit an obstacle that you think the hardware should handle, you're slashing that out of your features budget because now one of your guys has to try to write this thing for mip-mapping, which every video card in the world does, except this machine doesn't. And you'd ask, "How is that possible, that you would overlook this?" It was simple, stupid stuff, and we'd wind up having to invest our game budget in non-game code. The ideal way to design for a platform like that is probably to figure out what the capability of the machine is first, and then build your game around that. But if you have a vision for a game that you're striving for, and you're hoping that the technology supports it, it's a lot more difficult.

But XBox is so much more powerfully designed that you can plan for more of the features you wanted, and less of the hiccups and hidden obstacles. On the basis of what would make it easier for developers, this is a smartly designed system.

Presumably you had to write code on PS2 that you don't need now on XBox...

Of course. This is what we were upset about, because we want to build great games, and you'd think that we're all in this together. After a while, you get the impression that we're really not. In the end you go, "Yeah, well, grow up – this is the way the game business is." But this isn't what's going to make the game business what we want it to be – this is what keeps the game business where it is. And if we think that having a seven-billion-dollar industry is our goal, then it's pretty sad because there's no reason why this industry shouldn't become a 700-billion-dollar industry. Everyone should be playing this stuff, but as long as the software curve is so convoluted, then it's going to be a minimum market.

The game store should be like a music store – thousands of titles – but it's not. You can cut an album for 30 grand, or in your bedroom, but you can't produce a game today, one that will compete, with the systems you have to fight with to get there. But ideally you should, and that's why I think XBox is a step in the right direction, building upon evolving technology models rather than reinventing models for the sake of trying to maintain a monopoly on the hardware.

How has life changed for you, and what's changed at Oddworld in the years since *Abe's Oddysee*?

I've got a lot more grey hairs. I've never been involved with anything as difficult as software development. Being at Oddworld has been probably the most humbling experience of my life. There are a lot of really talented people trying to build something that hasn't been built before. It's just an extremely challenging endeavour – trying to build high-quality stuff in an industry where, lots of times, people don't really care about quality. But we've been successful, and in many ways very successful. We're on the front line now to take it all to the next level, which has been in many ways our dream.

It's tough when you're under pressure, when you want to spend a little more money on a title because you care about what the industry can be, but then have that put you in a dangerous place. The interesting thing about Oddworld is that there are a lot of people that the company's making better. Maybe it's those of us who are running it, or maybe it's the nature of the work we're trying to produce, but it really tends to bring forth the personal issues that we have and confront them. There's something about this company that makes the baggage in your life come to the surface, and you either have to deal with it, or you're not going to make it.

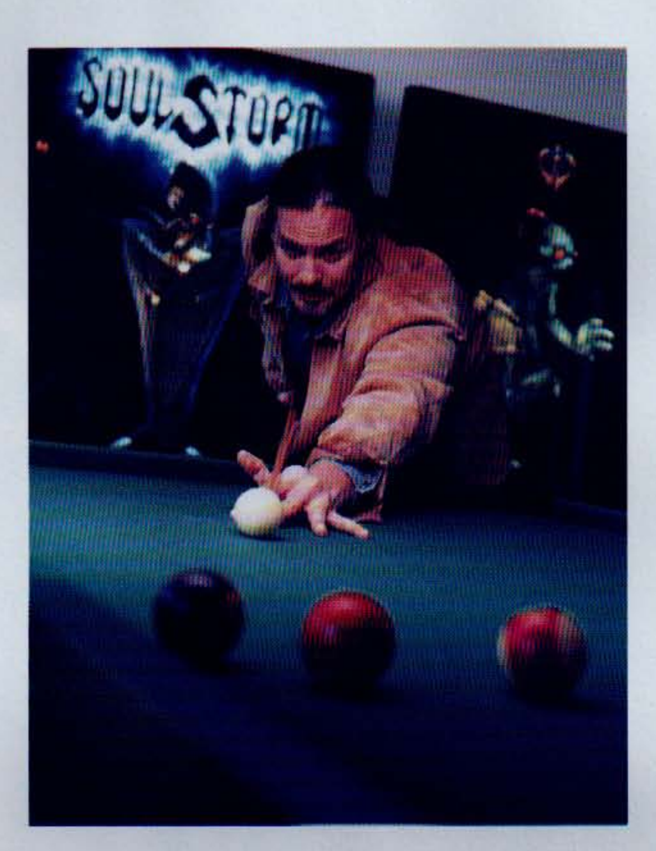
At times there's been turnover – people who don't want to build high-quality work, who believe you just go with it no matter what the quality of it is, people who don't believe in an organic process. And that's the only way you build great shit – an organic process. It has to change and improve as it's being worked on. If a guy is coding a character who thinks that as long as he did what was on his checklist, it's fine, no matter how it feels, he's not going to make it here. Having someone like Microsoft for a publisher, the excitement they have for supporting creators, and with a new console and the way they're designing it, it's such a tremendous release of pressure on all levels.

Your characters always seem to have been victimised, yet revenge never seems to be part of their motive. Is that something you're conscious of?

Yes. It's kind of a 'What's a healthy life?' perspective. Maybe that could get boring to a lot of people, but at the same time, it's very empowering to a lot of others. For example, without naming specifics, I get really annoyed when the point is, 'Let's go blow everything's head off, for... freedom!' That's a major problem in America today. I'm serious. We have more people in American prisons than in any other country in the world. You can get into a thousand different things about why, but in the end it's about what kind of content are we delivering to people, and why do we, as content providers, feel good about it?

In Hollywood, and especially in the game industry, [the theme of] 'You've been victimised!' gives you the licence to go kill and maim and torture because that's going to be your gratification. Personally, I think that's pretty weak. As a content designer and a writer, it's very easy. It's more difficult to try and achieve something that has a little more thought behind it, that has a little more of a feeling behind it, and yet at the same time can be aggressive in tense moments. I think 'Star Wars' is a good example of this. It's caring about the content of your content and not just creating stupid stories as excuses for violence. And in our games, while certainly they have their own representation of violence, the other feelings are what make life so fun.

And I think violence can be fun, but people may never know how difficult it was to create concepts like GameSpeak, how that's enabling us to manage so many more things. It will be a fundamental building stone for us forever, and we'll make it simpler and more powerful along the way, but what it really does is give us entertainment value and a sense of life that just hasn't been in these experiences before. And that's critical to evolving the experience beyond 'punch them in the head, shoot 'em, find the key'.



Lorne Lanning
cofounder,
Oddworld Inhabitants

"With PlayStation2, you'd ask, 'How is that possible, that you would overlook this?' It was simple, stupid stuff, and we'd wind up having to invest our game budget in non-game code"

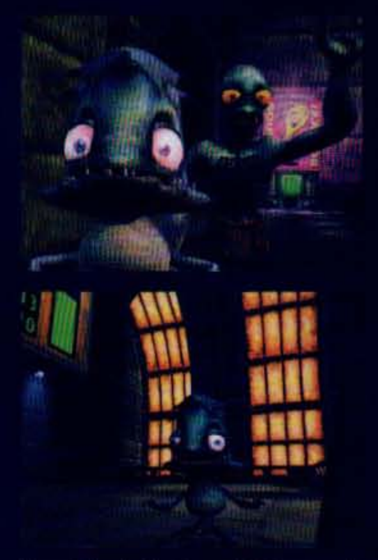
MUNCH'S ODDYSEE





Jumping between three different publishers and two distinctly opposing consoles, Oddworld Inhabitants finally makes the leap to full 3D

Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Oddworld Inhabitants**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Autumn (US)**



Abe and Munch take damage this time around, eliminating one-hit kills. The 'Bounce!' vending machine (top) dispenses power-ups, allowing characters to jump higher. Oddworld is clearly continuing with its ugly-bug vein (above)

Those who were able to look past the 2D graphics of *Abe's Oddysee* and *Abe's Exoddus* found themselves rewarded by a game series filled with interesting characters and often startlingly unique gameplay elements. With the advent of next-generation systems, developer Oddworld Inhabitants has spent the last two years crunching code to bring Abe to life in a 3D environment, all the while expanding on the unique concepts from the original two games with a design and story as ambitious as any title in recent years.

It's always been a bit unclear as to how the game will actually play, but the mystery was solved when, upon **Edge**'s arrival at Oddworld's office, the quick tour of the premises given by cofounder **Lorne Lanning** ended in front of an XBox dev kit with a functional game up and running. A detailed, realtime outdoor environment stretched across the monitor. Abe stood among green rolling hills and valleys, with other Mudokons visible in the background. Visually, the landscape is 100% Oddworld, but the game mechanics are not unlike *Mario 64*, with a camera that does a wonderful job taking care of itself.

Munch's Oddysee takes place in both indoor and outdoor environments, as players juggle between the roles of both Abe and Munch. The tasks players face are not unlike those from the first two

Players leading a group of Mudokans (left) will be able to issue attack commands. Expect plenty of action to accompany the traditional puzzle solving, but be wary of certain enemies wielding protective shields (top left)



games – friends need to be rescued, and through Oddworld's innovative GameSpeak system, you'll need to recruit and manage groups of NPCs to meet your objectives. Specifically, Abe will again have to help out his fellow Mudokons and get them to safety. Munch, on the other hand, must save a new species called Wuzzles – cute, furry little balls with eyes. In gameplay terms, Wuzzles function not unlike the power-ups in *Nemesis*, in that the more you have with you, the more effective you become. Abe still has his special chanting power that enables him to possess enemy characters, which are altered slightly for a 3D environment such that now you need to guide a 'possession bubble' into contact with the enemy you want to possess.

But what about the much touted 'living world' aspects of the game? They're still there, and in fact that's where much of the resource collection comes into play. The game features two kinds of currency: Spooce, a natural resource, is a spiritual commodity that Abe can use to buy power-ups at vending machines; Moolah is the financial currency of the Sligs, Glukkons, Vykkers, and other enemies. (Collecting Moolah is of equal importance because when Abe possesses an enemy character, he can use it to upgrade weapons.)

Interestingly, the game's world changes to reflect how well you perform. Lanning explains that the worse you do, the more the enemies deplete the environment. A skilled player will ultimately bring about a beautiful, natural environment, while players barely clinging on will watch as a wasteland spreads before their eyes.

Anyone who thinks that Oddworld is all about fancy art and narrative and not about gameplay misses the point. Throughout **Edge**'s visit, Lanning was intently focused on discussing how the game plays. When Abe possesses an enemy equipped with a gun, for example, the design takes full advantage of XBox's dual analogue controller, including its feature of buttons built into each stick: the left one steers the character's movement while the right directs its aim, and you only need to press down on the right stick to begin shooting. "It's just like playing *Robotron*," says Lanning.

Controlling Abe and Munch works in much the same way. Pressing down on the left stick puts Abe into 'sneak' mode, and he can sneak faster or slower based on the degree to which the stick is moved. Lanning is also in the process of designing some new, unique modes of transport within the gameworld, and even talks of adding a touch of *Asteroids*-style gameplay. But as the game has to be ready in time for launch, he admits that he's "not sure we're going to get flying vehicles into this one."

MALICE





Giant robots, oversized weapons, outlandish foes – Argonaut's first XBox title comes loaded with staple console game components. And then some...

Publisher: **TBA**
Developer: **Argonaut**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Autumn (US)**

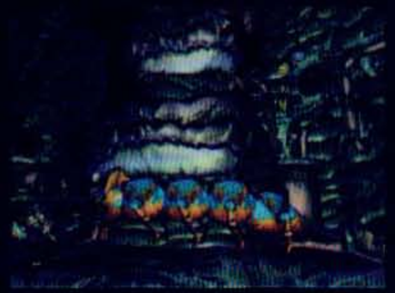


The wall-mounted feature behind Alice (above) is a 'Secondary Clockwork Computer Terminal', which is used to program new moves and spells into your hammer. Death puts in an appearance during a darker moment (top)

At this year's CES, *Malice* was wheeled out as a demonstration of what XBox could do. Now, however, there's a real game behind the image. *Malice* is the adventure of Alice, whom Argonaut producer/designer **Herman Serrano** gleefully describes as a "Temporal-Deity-Paradox." It would seem that the game begins with the world being destroyed, and so, according to Serrano, Alice's goal is "to figure out what destroyed the world, stop it from happening in the various timelines, and become a superpower in the process!"

And here's where the hammer comes in. Throughout the game as she skips around the various time periods, Alice finds and learns to use both elemental magic and three items: the Mace of Clubs, the Quantum Tuning Fork, and the Clockwork Hammer. Each has its own distinct set of skill moves and can be powered up and upgraded as you play. And you'll need it, too, since it turns out the evil behind the universal destruction is malice incarnate, the Dog God, and its legion of Crow Militia. To hope to defeat this nuclear-powered mad god, Alice will, by the end of the game, have to become a goddess herself.

Malice is intended mostly as an action game. The controls will, it is hoped, be rather simple, involving Alice smashing her way through the Crow Militia and other assorted enemies.




Argonaut's proprietary Shadowcaster engine works its eponymous magic (left). Argonaut's Herman Serrano has enjoyed fielding queries regarding the CES demo: "It's been kind of fun, actually. It's 100 per cent realtime... and yes, it is representative of how the game will look"

"Attacks cover either 90, 180, or 360 degrees in front of you," Serrano explains, "so you can just steam in and do some major damage. That said, combos need a little skill to execute."

The combo system is based on the five classic Chinese elements: Earth, Water, Metal, Wood, and Fire. Alice must learn to control the first four elements, while Fire represents the Dog God and the forces she battles against. Each combination of the Clockwork Hammer and an elemental spell type results in a different kind of spell, which can be leveled up. For example, using Metal magic calls up (and if you get the idea from these spell names that the game doesn't take itself too seriously, you're right) first the Hammer-Storm, then the Mow-Omatic, and, finally, the Giant Robot.

Malice uses Argonaut's own Shadowcaster engine. According to Serrano, "We've been working on it for about 18 months now, well before we were lucky enough to bring it to the *Malice* design last year." The engine's true strength is in the number of light sources it can handle at once, as well as generating multiple realtime shadows. Other features include support for high-end bump mapping, as well as per-pixel-controlled, Phong-based specular highlights. This last element is impressive because it enables a great deal of detail, since a single hi-res texture can be used for a large object, while the plastic and metal parts will still look completely different thanks to the way the highlights fall.

"The engine correctly handles shadows from multiple lights," Serrano insists. "It blends the colour the right way based on which lights are blocked. Self-shadowing is expensive – it burns fill rate. It's really more a question of how much speed can we afford to lose in any particular area. There are less 'crowded' areas in the game where multiple realtime lights are currently being cast, and you'll definitely see those in the final game."

Also in the final game will be a number of odd NPCs, just to keep things lively. These include Attila the Shun'd, hip lord of the undead; the tequila-guzzling shaman GloWur'ms; Death himself, who apparently hates paperwork; a 400-year-old witch who eats flies; and many others ("Too many to mention here," Serrano says). Yes, the game certainly is presented very much with its tongue in its cheek.

One thing many XBox games seem to be lacking at present is not so much a sense of style as much as a sense of personality – perhaps, even, a sense of sheer fun. But *Malice*, with its patently whacked-out tendencies, could provide this in spades

BOUNTY HUNTER



Fresh from porting *Starlancer* to Dreamcast, UK-based Warthog is attempting to meld *Half-Life* and *Wing Commander* with its genre-straddling epic

Publisher: **TBA**
Developer: **Warthog**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Autumn (US)**



Warthog is currently in the process of rejigging its renderer to take better advantage of native XBox functions like pixel and vertex shaders. According to Mike Arkin, in its finished state the game will look twice as good as this



"Missions are huge," say Arkin. "Some of the level are four to five times as large as current state-of-the-art firstperson shoote levels." They're complex, too: "Some missions go back and forth between flying and shooting two or three times"





A game that places you in the shoes of a 31st-century gunman and blends firstperson shooting with space flight and vehicular mayhem for the complete action-adventure experience? If this ambitious design sounds like science fiction, it's not – **Edge** has played an early version of *Bounty Hunter*. First, your correspondent took control of a spaceship and had to dogfight through a wave of foes, and then fly into the docking bay of a large space station. At that point, the in-game character let go of the onscreen flight yoke, pulled out a gun, and exited the ship into the hangar. This was done with no pause or loading, and at no point out of the player's control. Upon exiting, the firstperson mission objective began.

Considering the many different gaming modes and the enabling technology each requires, there is the danger that this game could end up being just another expensive gimmick. But Warthog's designers are determined to make sure that each aspect of the game is compelling throughout.

"It's Spaghetti Western meets 'Star Wars'," boasts executive producer **Mike Arkin**. "Even our hero's outfit is very Clint Eastwood." The Western influence also seeps into the game's landscape and mission design, so expect to deal with some rustlers along with the usual cast of futuristic mercenaries. And a strong script.

A good example of the latter is a level set in a narrow street, where vehicles transporting several VIPs are ambushed by enemies attacking from the rooftops with rocket launchers and laser guns. Your job i to run into the middle of the fray, secure each VIP, and get them out. "There are goin to be lots of interactions with NPCs and lot of scripted events," Arkin promises. "I'm talking about levels where there will be 15 t 20 scripted events continuously going on."

Perhaps the most PC-like title **Edge** ha yet seen destined for XBox status, *Bounty Hunter* will no doubt pave the way for deeper console-based experiences.

MAD DASH







Each track will feature sections, such as luge runs, which will allow players to slide and pull off tricks more commonly associated with snowboarding games. Each character model, meanwhile, consists of 2,800 polys



The nearest-to-complete XBox title **Edge** has seen, Eidos' running racer combines elements of *Road Rash*, *SSX*, and others to create an explosive mix

Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Autumn (US)**



"Nine courses doesn't sound a lot," confesses Glen Schofield, "but these are huge, and they don't loop back on themselves. You're looking at about seven-minute tracks." *Dash* currently runs at 30-40fps, but will hit 60 when complete

Mad Dash is a part platformer, part kart racer. The basic premise of cartoon animals racing on foot over branching routes is being ramped up by adding hand-to-hand combat reminiscent of *Road Rash*, *SSX*-style stunt segments, and the kind of explosive power-ups usually reserved for vehicular combat titles.

Choosing the proper path is fine, but in *Mad Dash*, victory may boil down to simply incapacitating your opponents. According to director **Glen Schofield**, "We give players some routes to load up on power-ups, then bring them back together and let them duke it out." *Mad Dash*'s selection of weaponry is a bit more unusual than your average smart bomb. For example, a power-up that creates a wall will unroll like a ribbon behind the player. Or you can simply punch, or take an opponent down with a flying tackle.

Every character also has unique attacks: Ash the dragon tries to incinerate other racers, and Spunx, a lab rat, wields a number of olfactory assaults. As varied as this battle system appears, Crystal is only just beginning to place power-ups on the tracks, so the final balance between racing and combat isn't yet clear. But environment hazards are in place, such as rolling boulders and TNT that can destroy a bridge at the exact moment an opponent reaches it.

In the nine combatants, Crystal's focus is to create characters that are fresh and endowed with unique abilities that will enhance gameplay. "We have Dashers, Bashers, and Gliders," clarifies Schofield. Sid, a cat in athletic shoes, is a Dasher, so he's very quick and able to run up steeper slopes than his competitors. Chops, a warthog who looks like a biker, is a Basher and thus is able to smash through obstacles, uncovering new routes or revealing hidden power-ups. Finally, there are Gliders, like Zero G, a furry riff on Buzz Lightyear, who can take to the air in order to circumvent entire sections of the course.

A strong recipe, then, for an accessible, adrenaline-fuelled ride.

The world's most respected videogame reviews

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Videogames on the **Edge**

This month's unanimous choice...

Phantasy Star Online

Loco's thirst for battle is legendary. If he goes down, he goes down fighting – but not before resurrecting a couple of team mates before buying it. Naturally.



(DC) Sega

Phantasy Star Online

The romantic of the group, Tink's ability to persuade Guild Cards from even the most random PSO gamer clearly masks an underlying emotional instability.



(DC) Sega

Phantasy Star Online

Alec Empire, the team's veteran anarchist, provides guile, destruction, sulking and screaming, and wraps it all in a lavender jumpsuit. FIGHT THE POWER!!!!!



(DC) Sega

Phantasy Star Online

Taurus, resplendent here in a fetching black outfit complemented by a stylish pair of platform boots, is the unit's full-time healer and part-time cheerleader.



(DC) Sega

4 Real, or not 4 Real?

The question of fun in virtual worlds

There's an argument that suggests Mario could never work on the realism-obsessed PC because hardcore PC gamers wouldn't accept a super-athletic fat plumber. A slightly crazy argument, of course, given that the same people are about to go wild for Lionhead's supernatural bipolar world (below), but even so, this is a community which can get angry about misplaced etchings on an FPS rifle. How would they cope with Mario's sudden, inexplicable change from 3D to, well, paper?

But who cares about realism? We want the purest form of entertainment a developer can provide, and if that means steamrollering a cultural icon, so be it. Meanwhile, the developers of *Operation: Flashpoint* are reported to have accurately modelled the speed of sound, meaning you'll hear the sound of an explosion just after witnessing the blast, or you'll die shortly before hearing the bullet leave the gun. A step forward? Maybe in the quest for an accurate physical model of life, but did being able to detach body parts enhance *Severance*, or did it just serve as a smoke-screen for a deficient game dynamic?

Look at *Serious Sam*. When 20 headless bombers rush wailing in the player's direction, their first reaction isn't to question how the enemies can scream without vocal chords, it's to run. It's fun. It's not real. Art critics don't judge a painting on how lifelike it is, so why should gamers take aesthetic realism as a benchmark for the entertainment quality of a title? *Doom* fans will claim *Serious Sam*'s not trying anything different, but the point isn't how reminiscent CroTeam's work is of id's. It's that in a gaming climate where realtime shadows and bump-mapping are often considered more important than a solid game dynamic, *Sam* just doesn't care. Only the most po-faced PC techboy would praise *Sam* for its engine. Only a fool would bemoan the lack of a sniper rifle.

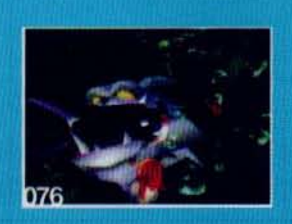
Anti-*Sam*'s are everywhere: David Braben's technically stunning *Frontier* wasn't just undone by the Krait load of bugs, but also because the premise was flawed. In the future, war may well be fought by space juggernauts destroying each other with the press of a button, but we don't want that. We want shiny silver bi-planes in zero-G, laser machine guns, and engines roaring through the vacuum. *Starfighter* forgets all about the real world, trusting in its own playground physics. It's a better game for it, because in an industry people flock to when they want to escape, realism's a niche market. Equally, creating a good game isn't a science. It's an art.





072





Black & White

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Electronic Arts** Developer: **Lionhead Studios** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**







Craftsmen repairing a damaged settlement are protected from incoming projectiles by the impervious dome of a shield spell



Worship powers miracles but also diverts manpower from construction and resource gathering. For an instant mana boost villagers and livestock can be tossed into the fiery sacrifice crucible

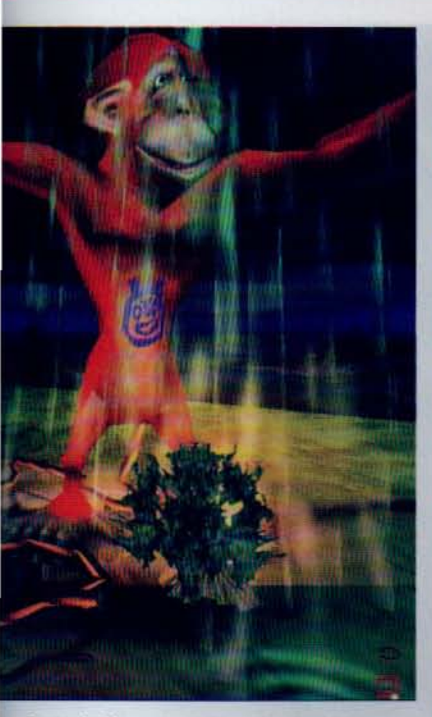
John Romero's FPS *Daikatana*, one of last year's biggest PC gaming disappointments, proved that big names, spiralling budgets, and painfully protracted development schedules don't necessarily presage great games. *Black & White* has endured a similarly elongated genesis, has an equally illustrious creative lynchpin (Peter Molyneux, the man behind titles like *Populous*, *Syndicate Wars*, and *Dungeon Keeper*) and carried similarly heavyweight expectations. The key difference between the two products is that *Black & White* delivers. And it delivers in spades.

Hugely ambitious gameplay melds realtime resource management, elements of RPG and action-adventure, beat 'em up, and Tamagotchi-style creature care in a sumptuous 3D environment. Players are deified, disembodied (apart from a single divine hand), and then deposited on the shores of an islanded Eden at the start of an epic five-chapter fiction that leaves no emotional stone unturned. Against a background of pantheistic power-struggles, godly influence must be extended by converting and expanding villages. Edenites can be won over with acts of kindness, cruelty, or pure showmanship, depending on mood or moral proclivity. A highly intelligent trainable creature is provided to assist the inevitably over-worked overlord.

Players are deified, disembodied, and then deposited on the shores of an islanded Eden at the start of an epic five-chapter fiction

Innovation infuses every fibre of *Black & White*. Even with skilfully integrated tutorials, helpful info signposts, and the humorously interposed advice of good and evil conscience characters, the first few hours of play can be somewhat bewildering. Once the inspired 'land grab' move method has been mastered and the awkward mouse-controlled camera system has been abandoned in favour of alternative keyboard shortcuts, a growing awareness of seemingly limitless behavioural freedom induces panic as well as intoxication.

Not until part way into the second chapter do the last vestiges of disorientation pass away. By this time the narrative is providing some welcome context, key skills have been learned, and the player is overseeing a fully functioning community and a house-trained creature. Even at this point a *Black & White* education has really only just begun. Honing skills like mouse-gestured miracle casting, or backspun boulder tossing is a an open-ended pursuit. A culture of playful experimentation is the natural consequence of unhurried plot pacing and an intensely interactive physical world.



Customisable creature tattoos, downloadable weather, an integral email interface, and the ability to name villagers from an *Outlook* contact list are just a few of the novelty features in *Black & White*





There are some 16 species of creature included in the game, with a choice of three – tiger, cow, or ape – available at the start

The patient storytelling also means there is ample time to explore the imaginative delights of the many optional sub-quests. Successful completion of one of these perplexing puzzles or tasks elicits rewards like new miracle dispensing shrines, or even the chance to change the species of your creature companion.

Towering above the rest of *Black & White*'s considerable accomplishments both figuratively and literally are the creatures. Training them and watching them grow is a uniquely satisfying gaming experience, guaranteed to transform the most ruthless *Soldier Of Fortune* into a psychobabble-spouting sociologist in the time it takes to strip down, clean, and reassemble an M16. The subtlety and scope of the instruction possible with the three training leashes is simply astounding. Teach miracles, man-management skills, toilet and dietary habits, pass on prejudices and preferences, shaping a personality (a word rarely used in conjunction with an AI entity) that invariably reflects your own.

Eden's human inhabitants are substantially smarter than their brethren in other RTS/settlement sims. They will devise their own work patterns, sleep when night falls, take tea breaks and rest days, fall in love, reproduce, and mourn dead kith and kin, leaving gods free to focus on strategic decision-making rather than fussing with unassigned or lost workers.

Spartan multiplayer and skirmish options are disappointments (although Lionhead has promised additional free maps to bolster these areas), but should not put off potential players. *Black & White* is a colossal achievement. Original but approachable, diverse but coherent, drop-dead gorgeous but deep, and above all obscenely entertaining.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten



Monster smash

When two antagonistic creatures encounter each other a circular arena is magically scribed around them and a beautifully animated beat 'em up sub-game commences. Offensive moves are triggered by clicking on the target area of an opponent's anatomy, defensive blocks and manoeuvres by clicking on your own fighter and the ground. Factor in cueable combo attacks, spectacular special moves, and the opportunity to cast miracles within the ring and pelt combatants from the sidelines and you have yourself another compelling reason to buy into *Black & White*.







Interactions between creatures and villagers are wonderfully varied. Above, a turtle victorious in battle joins in with ecstatic post-martial celebrations

ZOE – Zone Of The Enders

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house (KCEJ)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**











The collection of power-ups, essential to progress, is integrated nicely with an overarching narrative presenting a conflict between Leo and his nemesis, Viola

Z*one Of The Enders* isn't the first mecha combat videogame to derive its inspiration from the likes of Gundam and Robotech. That much is obvious. But while the *Armored Core* and *Virtual On* series each possess their own idiosyncratic charms, the convoluted control mechanisms and onscreen depiction of combat in these titles is a world away from the beguiling grace and speedy martial encounters that characterise the best examples of cel animation.

Not so *ZOE*. Uncomplicated controls, which facilitate a fluid and intuitive combat dynamic, backed up by a strong narrative, result in the title coming closer than any other to capturing the essence of the anime movies that are its genesis. The combat system at the heart of the game is almost unmatched in its realisation of a truly elegant and – for want of a better word – balletic solution to conflict. Lock-on targeting enables polished camera movements that capture the dynamism of showdowns, and despite the simplicity of the controls, encounters are satisfyingly complex.

Taking on the role of a 14-year-old mecha pilot, the player navigates the space colony Antilia. During combat itself, the action zooms down from a bird's eye view to a more localised environment, where it is possible to see roving bands of enemy robots on the horizon, which can be engaged at will. Each encounter requires a different strategy depending on the number and type of squad members, as well as – uniquely – the incentive to limit collateral damage. Given that the only obvious enticement to avoid damaging the surrounding area is a momentarily blurred screen, it is surprising the extent to which this principle informs confrontations.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in several optional missions, which give the game a forking structure. At key moments it is up to the player to decide whether to answer an SOS from one location, or to simply fulfil mission objectives. Of course, while there is an even greater onus to avoid damage while answering such a call, there is often the added bonus of power-ups and the like. Indeed the acquisition of power-ups is another core component of the game's appeal, be they in the form of passcodes, augmentation programs, ammunition, or even – in one mission – an unpiloted mecha.

> *Zone Of The Enders* comes closer than any other title to capturing the essence of the anime movies that are its genesis



The character designs of Yoji Shinkawa are an essential ingredient in the *ZOE* melting pot, as is amply demonstrated by one of the characteristically huge bosses (shown above) encountered early in the game

However, *ZOE* is not an unmitigated success. It's not always clear, for example, which area contains an item that is required to unlock other areas, resulting in existing locations having to be fruitlessly cleared of enemy mecha and explored on more than one occasion. The real problem with the game, though, is its brevity, which makes for a much more lightweight experience than the delightful gameplay mechanics initially suggest. The whole thing lasts little more than four or five hours, and that's including some lengthy, though engaging, cut-scenes. Indeed, the narrative itself seems to be curtailed halfway through, as does the learning curve. Just as players are exploring the layers of control provided by the various power-ups and different environments the game is finished. Although there is some replayability value derived from the relationship between the development of your mecha's AI and any extraneous damage that occurs, the number of combat locations is small. Likewise, a versus mode seems tacked on and the



One level (right) requires players to defuse time bombs while simultaneously seeing off aerial attacks











Despite the elegance of the game's interface, the fundamental problem is that the game itself is too short for players to fully get to grips with its intricacies. Consequently, there is a button-bashing element to proceedings that diminishes the impact of what would otherwise be lauded for breaking new ground in gameplay terms

limited choice of mecha combined with a less effective camera system employed in this mode mean that it is not really adequate compensation for a short-lived affair.

In short, the rarefied heights of gameplay are let down by an inadequate and overly concise structure. Perhaps the least desirable trait of anime movies is the raft of sequels that they spawn, but *ZOE* seems unthinkingly to have emulated its cinematic forebears in this respect, too. If a sequel does appear, though, it will be scant consolation for tantalised gamers.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Although there is a relatively low number of robot types, these increase in ability and power as the game progresses, often leaving behind essential weapons, ammunition or passcodes in their wake

Shinkawa stuns

Although best known for his conceptual art on the *Metal Gear* series, Yoji Shinkawa's involvement is another aspect of the anime-authentic style of *ZOE*. The mecha designs, along with their bizarre monikers, are entirely in keeping with the stunning automata architecture that manifests itself so readily on video screens of anime enthusiasts. Jehuty – the robot that that player pilots – is striking to watch, either skating elegantly through underground passages, or soaring across the skies, and bosses are among some of the most eye-catching to be found in any videogame genre.



Star Wars: Star Fighter

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **LucasArts** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Picture the scene: 'Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace' has just been through extensive post-production. George Lucas is sitting back and admiring his handiwork. Rightly proud of the technical achievements, he is then shown the potential of PlayStation2 by Sony executives. "They just put this toy on the desk that is even more powerful," he ruefully comments. While the heady whiff of media management is unmistakable, the remark naturally

Scrape away the gloss associated with the 'Star Wars' universe, and what remains is a slick but incredibly derivative space shooter

accords with an expectancy that a 128bit 'Star Wars' game will be an improvement over past efforts. Comparison between the technical achievements of 'Episode One' to those in Lucas's first outing with 'Star Wars' back in 1977 serves as a corollary to the videogame interpretations of the franchise. More powerful tools do not necessarily produce better art.

Star Wars: Starfighter may be visually arresting, but it lacks heart. Scrape away the gloss associated with the 'Star Wars' universe, and what remains underneath is a slick but incredibly derivative space shooter. Compared to the strategical depth and smooth learning curve of *X-Wing* it falls short. And while *Starfighter* offers missions similar in style to those found in *Rogue Squadron*, sublime touches – such as taking down Imperial AT-AT Walkers with a harpoon – are sadly absent. While LucasArts' first outing on PS2 is better than most of the risible 'Episode One' tie-ins, it still fails to capture the magic of earlier Jedi-inspired adventures which appeared on the SNES and PC.

Pitched into the war between Naboo and the pernicious Trade Federation the player must take on 14 missions situated on three planets. Though the plot is unveiled with economy, the three-disparate-characters-brought-together-to-defend-the-planet storyline is less than inspiring. Structurally, missions are completed in rigid order, and while bonus missions can be unlocked and the difficulty level changed, it will not take experienced gamers more than a few days to complete the game.

Depressingly, *Starfighter* follows the tradition of nearly every other space-combat game. Enemies are acquired, targeted, and then destroyed. The dogfighting follows this formula with an overly comfortable regularity. Other missions which take place on planet surfaces vary this mechanic somewhat, but having no control over angling deflector shields (as in *X-Wing* and *TIE Fighter*) seriously limits decision-making opportunities. Thankfully, three different craft can be piloted, and each has a distinct secondary weapon. While not staggering in terms of innovation, bombing certain targets with the pirate Havoc ship or depleting enemy energy shields with the Guardian Mantis offers some variety.

One of the more compelling missions requires the player to destroy Federation military installations on Eos. Taking out the landing pad, for instance, will stop the flow of droid fighters threatening to compromise your success. It is just a pity that more missions do not provide such opportunities to let the player think for themselves. Sadly, objectives are mostly completed one by one triggering the next scripted event. This nurses the intellect rather than challenges it. While *Star Wars: Starfighter* entertains for short spells, in terms of game design and structure there is little ambition on show. Even the



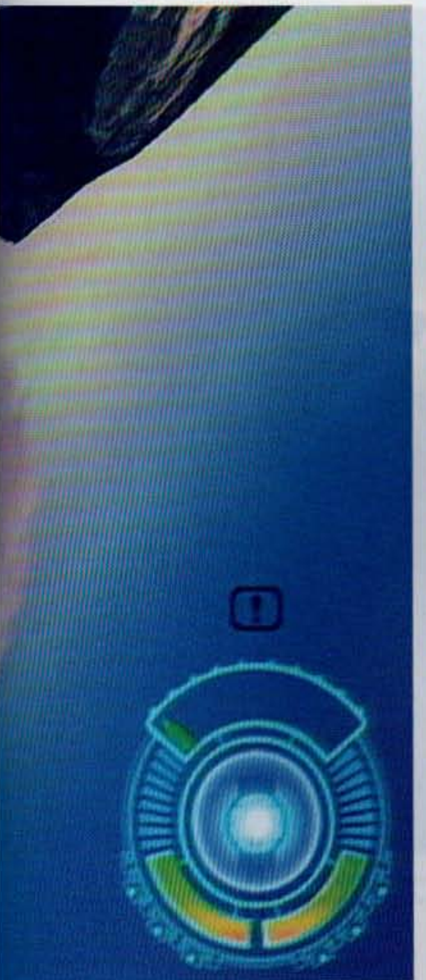




The D-pad is used to issue commands to your wingmen. These cover the usual bases of protection, attack and report in. They rarely feature heavily in the game

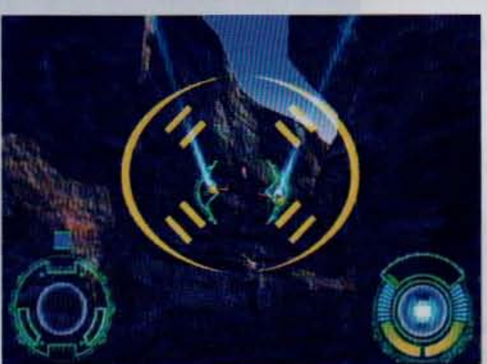


Control of the three ships in the game has been implemented incredibly well. Weapons are assigned to shoulder buttons leaving your thumbs free to manipulate the two analogue sticks for slick manoeuvring







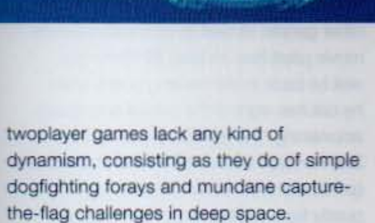




While the blasting action can become repetitive, particular praise must go to the pyrotechnical effects, which have been wonderfully rendered

twoplayer games lack any kind of dynamism, consisting as they do of simple dogfighting forays and mundane capture-the-flag challenges in deep space.

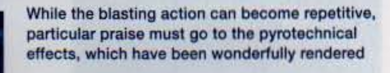
Nevertheless, at times *Starfighter* genuinely thrills. Watching as a host of droid fighters swoop out of hyperspace and into your field of vision is a stirring experience, and for the first time adequately captures the tension and visual flair contained in the films. And while there are not enough missions to keep the die-hard 'Star Wars' fan gratified for long, LucasArts' first 128bit adaptation of the franchise is enjoyable enough.



Edge rating: Six out of ten



One major criticism difficult to ignore is the game's poor conveyance of speed. Accelerating towards targets, especially in outer space, appears sluggish. Only in the tight canyons do things improve





Bonus, what bonus?

While the inclusion of bonus missions to extend a title's durability are always welcome, those contained in *Star Wars: Starfighter* lack imagination. A typical example will ask you to defend a base from endlessly spawning droids. It's engaging for a while, but such blasting mayhem will never capture the joy of using the Force in the trench level on the original coin-op.

Conker's Bad Fur Day

Format: **Nintendo 64** Publisher: **T•HQ** Developer: **Rare** Price: **$60 (£40)** Release: **Out now (US) April 1 (UK)**









***Bad Fur Day* doesn't include as much swearing as T•HQ's PR might have you believe. "Twatting shite!", blurted by an upset cog, is the worst of the curses**

Who knows what drove Rare to transform the anodyne *Twelve Tales* into the foul-mouthed attention generator that is *Conker's Bad Fur Day*. Perhaps journalistic indifference was the trigger – in which case, it's mission accomplished, as the Beavis & Buttheads of the online world giggle and snort their way through acres of glowing coverage.

Of course, the Twycross codeshop knows better than to sacrifice content for crudity – this just isn't immediately apparent from the first play. *Conker's Bad Fur Day* kicks off with cut-scene after unskippable cut-scene, with hit-and-miss jokes laid on thick, and only minute-long bursts of primitive play sandwiched between. Worse, it's soon clear that the game is driven by a series of context-sensitive moments, where tapping B temporarily gives the hungover squirrel a new ability – such as the power to urinate on enemies. These threaten to make the title little more than a procession of barely connected and puerile minigames.

Thankfully, the gameplay and gags are soon bristling with quality, as the minigames are joined by more traditional platforming – if rolling balls of faeces around hillsides or bouncing on a sunflower's heaving breasts can be termed 'traditional'. Admittedly, the level designs seem to have dictated the storyline rather than vice versa. Rare has trouble explaining why Conker is suddenly plunged into a bank raid, or an all-out war. But, by the second of the game's eight diverse levels, the glorious visuals and increasingly varied set-pieces have fused to create a thoroughly enjoyable interactive cartoon.

In fact, *Conker's Bad Fur Day*'s audio-visuals merit special attention. The evocative facial expressions and matching of mouth movement to speech are impressive enough. But the sheer size, clarity and smoothness of the squirrel's blazingly colourful surroundings represent Rare's finest work to date, and all without an Expansion Pak's help. One section takes place aboard a breathtakingly swift hoverboard – it takes a developer of some cheek to create a racing engine worthy of an entire game, then tuck it away inside a three-minute minigame.

The Twycross codeshop knows better than to sacrifice content for crudity – this just isn't immediately apparent from the first play



Leaping into one of *Bad Fur Day*'s controllable vehicles – be it a swift hoverboard or a trundling tank – is invariably a pleasure. The chunks of chocolate, incidentally, represent the squirrel's current health

That said, it's disappointing to see *Bad Fur Day* burdened with the kind of technical inadequacies that you would expect Rare to have eliminated by now. The camera is the main culprit, often stubbornly fixing itself in a spot that makes manoeuvring through spinning blades or negotiating treacherously narrow platforms unnecessarily tricky. Elsewhere, compulsory long falls make health loss unavoidable, and – as in *Banjo-Tooie* – the player's rate of progress is cruelly hindered at points. Being forced to crawl over to an aspirin cabinet every 60 seconds in a vain bid to recover from a bender may be realistic, but it doesn't make for great gaming.

Despite such irritants, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* is rarely less than compulsive. Once Rare gets into its stride, classical platforming sits alongside sections that effortlessly ape other genres, as well as eminently playable movie pastiches. Indeed, Mr Perry may well be back to the drawing board when he catches sight of the brilliant and visually astonishing 'The Matrix' rip-off. *Conker's Bad Fur Day* may not be the N64's lengthiest game, and the distinctive sections yo-yo in quality from sublime to just plain dull, but the thirst for more you're left with after the cracking finale is ample evidence that this is a game much more than the sum of its parts.

Combine all this with one of the N64's most unexpectedly enjoyable multiplayer game modes, and *Conker's Bad Fur Day* – which looks to be the last of the N64's big hitters – proves a worthy swansong for the console. Not Rare's best by a long shot, but it's a refreshingly unique if nevertheless juvenile experience.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten











Much of the space on *Bad Fur Day*'s costly 512Mb cart is given over to over two hours of character speech. Thankfully, Rare's voice artists have improved considerably since *Perfect Dark*

Conker goes to the cinema

The movie pastiches in *Conker's Bad Fur Day* are plentiful, and superbly executed. 'The Matrix' and 'Aliens' are obvious targets, but Rare's spoofs are heavy on gameplay, and put videogaming's bulging back catalogue of shoddy film tie-ins to shame. Meanwhile, a host of more subtle references – including Birdy the Scarecrow selling you the game's instruction book with the words, "Manual love you long time" – demonstrate that *Bad Fur Day*'s 'mature' attitude extends to much more than just fart gags.











Few moments of videogame gore have the power to truly disgust. Ripping huge chunks of flesh from this caveman's oversized rear, however, definitely rates as one of them

Quake III Revolution

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **EA** Developer: **Bullfrog Productions/id Software** Price: **£40** Release: **April 6**



The team's avowed goal was to ensure *Revolution* bears comparison with *Quake III* running on a high-spec PC. By and large it has managed to achieve this

Multiplayer

Multiplayer deathmatch is obviously the essence of *Quake III*, and *Revolution* doesn't disappoint. While, as in the DC version, the 12 weapons on offer aren't represented in all their oneplayer glory, the game is fast, and the arenas look fantastic. The zoom function has been neatly built in to the joypad set-ups, and you can expect plenty of gory death animations. While some may bemoan the lack of keyboard controls, there are few fourplayer console experiences that rank with all-out, all-joypad FPS-ing, and at last PS2 owners will be able to enjoy it properly.



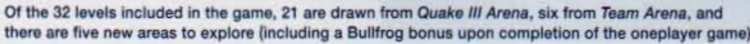












Of the 32 levels included in the game, 21 are drawn from *Quake III Arena*, six from *Team Arena*, and there are five new areas to explore (including a Bullfrog bonus upon completion of the oneplayer game)

Attempting to port *Quake III* to PlayStation2 is surely of a thankless task. Get it right, and the most you may receive for all your hard work is a vague 'well done'; get it wrong, and you can expect a savaging. Which is why you can't blame the attack dog that dwells inside many journalists for salivating wildly at the lack of preview code and the news that reviewers would have to visit EA HQ if they wanted to see *Revolution*.

However, it turns out that Bullfrog and id have managed to produce the best example of an FPS to have appeared on PlayStation2 to date. It looks far smoother than *Time Splitters*, speed-wise it leaves *Unreal Tournament* at the blocks, and the team has also put real thought into how to translate *Quake III* for (an offline) console – differentiating it slightly from the fantastic Dreamcast iteration of the game.

A spirited attempt has been made to breathe new life into oneplayer *Quake III*, in that instead of adhering 100 per cent to deathmatch, as you Campaign towards a showdown with the Vadrigar you can expect a little variety. This comes in the form of levels based on some of the eight game modes available in multiplayer, a good example of which is Possession, where the aim is to hare around with a fluttering white flag rammed down your trousers for as long as possible without getting fragged.

Controls-wise, a brave and important decision has been taken: keyboard control is out. While this goes against all that seems natural in the *Quake* universe, the upshot is a superior console game. While claims that the arenas have been tweaked to accommodate joypad control are a little suspect (there are five new levels – 32 overall, 29 in Campaign), there is the murderous equivalent of a driver's aid in that the player can decide to employ the shade of an auto-aim function. Combine this with joypad configurations which range from the dual-analogue-stick system of *Time Splitters* to a set-up similar to PSone *Quake II*, and you're soon be firing on all cylinders.

Perhaps the most pronounced difference between this and other versions of *Quake III* is that the bots aren't quite as sharp, but with such an accomplished multiplayer game on offer this is unlikely to impact on the player's enjoyment. In short, Bullfrog and id have produced a thoroughly convincing *Quake III* for PS2, and as a result there's little to add beyond a vague 'well done'.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Serious Sam

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Take 2 Interactive** Developer: **CroTeam** Price: **£20** Release: **Q2**

Debut records are the best, so the theory goes, because there's always the feeling among those involved that this might be their only chance. The finished product might be raw, but it's a truer representation of the artist's talent. There's no doubting that CroTeam's debut, *Serious Sam*, carries that one-shot enthusiasm, but the real surprise here is that its stylistically autistic, assailant-fixated approach to the FPS has produced something absent from PC gaming for a considerable length of time: fun.

CroTeam's take on the genre is a lo-fi one, reduced to first principles. Vast open arenas are linked with short bursts of Egyptian architecture, and filled with ridiculous numbers of ridiculous enemies. Health power-ups, weapons, and ammo are thickly distributed across each linear level. Picking them up, or using the switches that must be found to progress, will trigger an event. Events usually involve the sudden appearance of hundreds of monsters, in startling *Robotron*-style numbers. Kill them, find the exit, and you'll move to the next level.

Fans of *Doom* will recognise the pattern, but in truth, CroTeam's vision is even purer than id's genre-defining work. It's a series of set pieces, as scripted and triggered as *Half-Life*'s oft-praised movie moments, and the surprises don't lie in shock-tactic level design, but in the appearance of fantastic numbers and wildly disparate types of enemies. Some are giant robots, and some are console-style space monsters, and some are simply psychotically infantile, like scratchy ink sketches from a serial killer's notebook. None of it fits together, none of it makes sense, and it doesn't matter. It feels like bedroom coding all over again – whimsical ideas thrown together not to any grand design, but in a quest for a more enjoyable experience.

And that's the thing: visually and structurally, *Serious Sam* may be unfailingly retro, but as a gaming philosophy it's a generation ahead of its peers. Like sickeningly giddy pure punk-pop, the non-stop thrash frenzy becomes increasingly difficult to stomach with extended play, but that doesn't stop it from being magical in short, kill-filled bursts. It's an astonishing debut, and it's likely CroTeam will have the chance to follow it up with another long player at a later date. Hopefully it can make it as good as this one.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









Doom-mongering

Serious Sam clearly owes a lot to *Doom*, and not just in its purebred killing machine ethos. Specifically, the weapon shortcut keys 1-5 provide exactly the same function as those in id's shooter – melée weapon, pistol, shotgun, chaingun, rocket launcher – meaning players raised as marines on Phobos will have no trouble slipping into Sam's shoes. There's also a plasma rifle, but *Doom*'s ultimate weapon, the subtly acronymed BFG, is absent. *Serious Sam*'s serious replacement? An old-skool cannon whose oversized cannonballs will roll right through all but the biggest enemies.



The huge mecha-scorpions open fire on sight, meaning you'll probably be alerted to their presence by your fast-draining health bar. The best enemies, though, are the headless bombers, who charge at you, screaming, and explode when they're close by. 3D surround sound is helpful in locating them

Paper Mario

Format: **Nintendo 64** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US) Q3 (UK)**





If Mario gets poisoned, he'll turn green, and, in traditional RPG fashion, lose hit points after every turn. Finish the fight, and he'll be cured





Typical lock-and-key dungeon adventures are made compelling thanks to clever level design, including morphing stairs



Though static shots of *Paper Mario* often fail to impress, the blend of 2D characters in a 3D world has enabled Nintendo to utilise some clever effects. The camera angle is constantly shifting, but never to the detriment of character control. The spot shadows cast by Mario and friends help the player to judge depth

A little help from your friends

On his quest to recover the all-powerful Star Rod from the seemingly indefatigable Bowser, Mario encounters a variety of helpful flat-planet citizens. Some of these will join his party, meaning Mario won't only receive their fighting assistance but will also be able to take advantage of their very particular skills. Bombette, for example, can be carefully placed to blow up cracked walls, whereas Mario can throw his Koopa friend in order to retrieve unreachable items. Solving the puzzles will often reveal badges – magical items which, when worn, will enhance the plumber's attacking or defensive skills.



Looking like a mutant hybrid of *Super Mario World* and *Mario 64*, and starring a *PaRappa*-style 2D Mario, it'd be easy to dismiss *Paper Mario* as a gimmicky franchise cash-in in the dying days of the N64. It's just as easy to check the visuals and throw the cartridge into the 'kids-only' pile, but that'd be unfair on a fractionally flawed game which smartly combines elements from Link and Mario's Super Famicom outings.

It's a shame, then, that the combat – the one part of *Paper Mario* that isn't stolen from *Zelda* or *Super Mario World* – ends up letting the title down. During encounters, play switches to a static, turn-based fighting system, where the player selects the attacks he wishes to perform, and executes them using a modicum of arcade timing. Hit points are scored in single figures with little randomisation, adding a logical feel to the combat progression. The system imbues each fight with a predictability which rewards good planning, but also makes damage depressingly unavoidable.

The main problem, though, is that the entire turn-based dynamic is a good deal less fun than the rushing around, puzzle solving, and exploring that surrounds it. Jumping on an enemy's head during the fluid exploration may gain you the first strike, but despite adding an entertaining arcade element, it also demonstrates just how much more fun *Paper Mario* would have been if that's all there was to the combat. As it is, it's tempting to run away from the enemies, which leads to problems later when a weak, cowardly Mario encounters stronger, unavoidable opposition.

Combat criticisms aside, the Mario RPG world is inventive, gorgeous, and rich with subquests and in-jokes. Those taking a casual glance will discard it as a work for children only, just as they could have done with so many of Nintendo's unmissable titles before. *Paper Mario* isn't quite that good, but ignore the doubters; it's only a kids' game insofar as you'd imagine a direct crossbreed of the *Legend Of Zelda* and *Super Mario World* to be. Which means despite being thematically akin to a Saturday morning cartoon series, those able to stomach the Super Famicom worlds of Link and Luigi will have no problem accepting this as a valid (if slightly childish) form of entertainment. Everyone else is missing out.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Time Crisis: Project Titan

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Namco** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

A PlayStation-only spin-off from the popular lightgun shooter (itself originally a coin-op, of course, currently with its own dedicated sequel) becomes the latest in too few games requiring you to dust off your GunCon (or thirdparty alternative) peripheral.

Sliding once again into the polygonal strides of VSSE agent Richard Miller, you find yourself accused of assassinating Xavier Serrano, leader of Cuba – sorry – Caruba. Realising gremlins are at play, your organisation kindly allows you 48 hours to find those responsible for framing you. Naturally, you are on your own.

This being a *Time Crisis* game, your freedom very much depends on disposing of whoever decides to stand in your way by pulling your plastic trigger repeatedly. Should their own trigger-led riposte prove life-threatening at times, you can of course retreat behind the safety of nearby objects. Crouch around for too long, however, and your time limit runs out. Cue the appearance of the 'continue' screen.

The action is relentless, as you would expect. As you progress along the varying locations, an assortment of assailants endowed with numerous predetermined attack patterns make continual appearances, demanding to be gunned down. What makes this so satisfying is that, unlike other lightgun games, the *Time Crisis* series allows you to shoot your enemies more than once, with every bullet affecting their corpse's trajectory. You don't have to, clearly, but the option is there nonetheless.

Yet there's nothing here that is new. To its credit, Namco has included a multi-hiding system during boss battles (see 'Revolving action'). Granted, it adds a little to the proceedings, but you can't help feeling the game would have benefited from a few more innovative touches, particularly as what is on offer here feels dated. It's simply the same old memory test, requiring you to learn your enemy's well-rehearsed routines in order to eventually make your way to the final battle. It's a shame Namco shied away from further toying with the concept, as it is more than capable of coming up with ideas.

Still, it represents an enjoyable challenge, but not enough inventiveness to ensure AAA (or even AA) status. But, as with all of the better lightgun efforts, a quick blast now and again is certainly not out of the question.

Edge rating: Six out of ten







You get the feeling the number of opponents has increased for this console version, even if the graphical level appears inferior to the original *Time Crisis* conversion from some four years ago







Don't let those lovely sailor shorts fool you into thinking these men don't know how to handle their guns (above left), particularly when some of their friends can levitate themselves out of trouble



Revolving action

The only significant innovation to have affected Namco's latest PS project is the game's multi-hiding system evident during some of the end-of-level boss encounters. By shooting the arrows on the sides of the screen, you get to to select your ducking position from a set of predetermined points – the degree of freedom is dependent on the setting. While hardly earth shattering, it does introduce another strategic element into an otherwise straightforward formula.

Three Kingdoms: Fate Of The Dragon

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Eidos Interactive** Developer: **Overmax Studios** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**





Storming battlements (top) can be a challenging task. Good preparation is essential: making camp outside and having siege weaponry at hand is wise



RTS fans may be perturbed by the amount of time spent managing your cities, but micro-management of resources is the key to creating the best armies. This becomes more apparent during later levels

Three Kingdoms: Fate Of The Dragon initially appears out of step with its peers. Beneath its lo-fi, sprite-based engine and minimalist presentation, however, lies a game that adulterates solid, familiar mechanics with a number of relatively innovative ideas.

Closer in form and play to Microsoft's *Age Of Empires* franchise than the Westwood model for the genre, *Fate Of The Dragon* comprises city building and resource management, punctuated by skirmishes or all-out warfare. The more advanced your home base is, the greater the potential size and efficiency of your army. Each city, though, has protected battlements that must be scaled by appropriately equipped aggressors. Furthermore, any troops sent on a foray outside of their home town must be accompanied with supply wagons. Fail to supply the latter and an army will soon be lost.

These two devices help prevent the tit-for-tat wars of attrition that blight so many other RTS titles. Sadly, suspect unit AI, tactically sterile battles (battlement attacks notwithstanding), and a flat Campaign mode rob *Fate Of The Dragon* of impact. It is a pleasant, if flawed, toyset best suited to those who will experiment with its compulsive multiplayer mode.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

The Moon Project

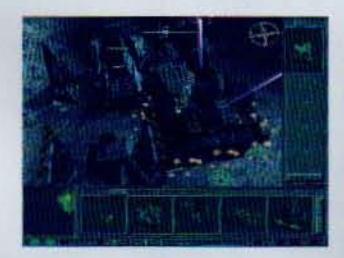
Format: **PC** Publisher: **Mattel** Developer: **Topware** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

While its high production values and accomplished aesthetics are certainly arresting, don't be fooled. As attractive as *The Moon Project* appears, it is an RTS for RTS players – not just an exercise in preaching to the converted, but also a product of the assumption that complexity confers superiority.

A clear case of consolidation over conception, *The Moon Project* offers genre mainstays and recent contrivances in eye-catching form. In attempting to offer a definitive RTS experience, the title's variables and intricacies threaten to overwhelm the one piece of PC hardware that can't be upgraded: the player. To all but the devotee, its learning curve is notably steep; later, your administrative skills are tested, sometimes to the limit of reasonable patience. *The Moon Project's* engine allows for large and, on occasion, spectacular battles. The attendant premium is that you surrender yourself to busywork that can be fraught, tedious, or – perversely – both.

Of course, *The Moon Project* is targeted at a clear demographic: a hardcore, RTS-loving audience that may come to love it, over-egged pudding that it is. But probably not.

Edge rating: Five out of ten





***The Moon Project* – like many recent RTS titles – often feels 'on rails'. Having moved your units into position, battles become basic, AI-controlled huddles**



The ability to effectively create vehicles reduces the tactical substance of any given battle. Why? Because it destroys the elementary paper-scissors-stone dynamic that underpins the brightest and best RTS titles

Making a few Squid from gaming

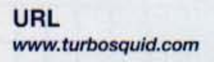
Turbo Squid's aim is to become the marketplace for both buyers and sellers of digital assets







Easy to search using either keywords or using thumbnails, Turbo Squid is becoming the online marketplace for art assets such as 3D models, motion-capture data, and textures



URL
www.turbosquid.com

One criticism of many Internet ventures is their failure to fully leverage the potential of online connectivity. Lastminute.com could operate as a telesales company, for instance, but this isn't a charge that could be levelled at file-swapping enterprises such as Napster. For businesses based on digital assets such as music or software, the Internet is the obvious distribution mechanism. It's this dynamic, albeit combined with a workable commercial backbone, that Turbo Squid hopes to exploit for digital assets.

Launched last summer out of 3D plug-in specialist Digimation, Turbo Squid's goal is to be the marketplace for all digital assets. "A year from now, when someone thinks of Turbo Squid, we want the market to think of us as the place to buy and sell digital assets. From architectural drawings to film and video music files to institutional documents, our goal is to be the one-stop shop for all digital assets," explains Turbo Squid's president and CEO, **David Avgikos**.

The Web-based service currently supports 3D models and textures and has more than 30,000 assets in its database, with 30,000 more in the process of being uploaded. These range from straightforward character models to ships, vehicles, and textures, and – thanks to a deal with Pepper's Ghost – generic motion-capture data.

In part, this early success is due to the fact that Turbo Squid works as an open marketplace. Parties looking for specific models or textures search the database using keywords or viewing thumbnails. Conversely, 3D artists using *Max*, *Maya*, and *Lightwave* can sell their work online by simply registering at the Web site, downloading the Turbo Squid client and then uploading their models to the site. They also set the price for their work: whatever they think is appropriate. When work is sold, the revenue is split 50-50 between the artist and Turbo Squid. "Considering the cost of housing the assets, taking care of the financial transactions and the marketing of Turbo Squid, we think this is a fair split," Avgikos says. It's important to point out that the hosting deal is non-exclusive, so artists don't lose control of their assets. A peer-rating system ensures that good assets get more attention than scrappy examples.

A recent agreement with Discreet is certain to ramp up Turbo Squid's profile in the digital art community, too. A pull-down menu within *3DS Max 4* means that Turbo Squid can be launched from inside the art package, and selected models and textures can then be dragged and dropped back. "With Turbo Squid's tight *Max* integration, workflow is not interrupted every time you need a model, texture, or motion file," says Avgikos.

While film and video professionals, game developers, and 3D Web designers are all using Turbo Squid, the videogame industry is a particular target. "We have very definite plans to support the gaming community," says Avgikos. "One way in which we will do this is by supporting Discreet's *GMax* offering, which allows gamers to build their own levels. The combination of *GMax* and Turbo Squid will provide opportunities for those creating and using assets such as levels, mods, textures, and models."



3D artists can sell their work online through Turbo Squid, splitting revenues 50-50

One way in which Turbo Squid intends to target the videogame industry is by supporting Discreet's *GMax*, which enables gamers to build their own levels

Working the Squid

The current version of Turbo Squid (v1.5) is a 2Mb downloadable program for *Windows*. At GDC, however, a Web-based version of Turbo Squid will be released. Functionally the same as the PC download, this will open up Turbo Squid to Unix and Mac users for the first time. "Features such as interactive 3D streaming and advanced search features to help users locate assets faster, in the right format and at the right price, will be included," says David Avgikos. It will also be supported by a newly revamped Web site, which will be launched with a raffle for $10,000 worth of hardware and software running for 30 days from March 22.

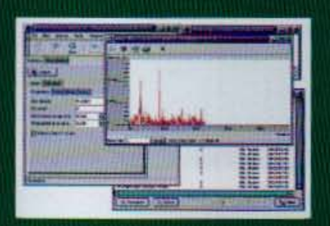
Truth doesn't hurt networks

Truth Technology's emulation tools ease the pain for studios looking to push network gaming forward





Truth Technology CEO Russell Cameron





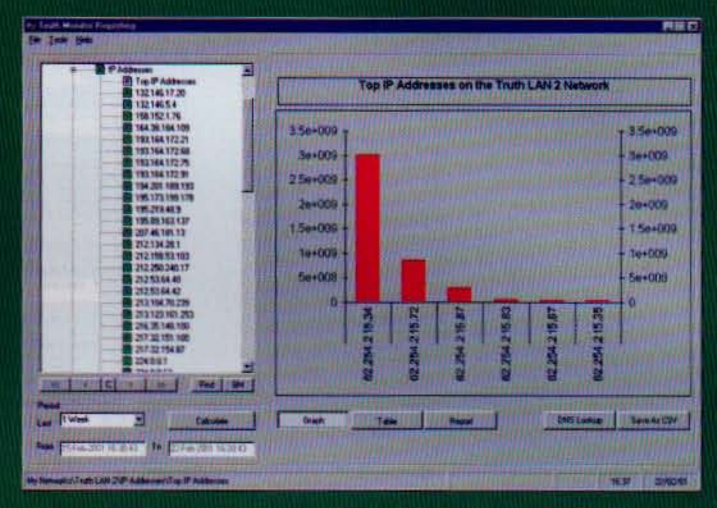
When combined with the monitoring interface, Truth's tools enable a user to effect how a network is operating both on the macro and micro scale

Developing software for closed platforms such as consoles is relatively straightforward, but convergence means that future design targets will be more akin to the open standards of the PC space. The potential for network gaming across PlayStation2, XBox, and mobile devices, in particular, will require as much concentration on the technology of networks as on the throughput of the Emotion Engine.

Enter Truth Technology's network application development tools. Formed last April out of BT Lab's Future Testbed, the company's offerings cover everything from monitoring the health of a Local Area Network (LAN) to emulating the effect of entering a tunnel while connected to a wireless game of 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?'

"We can do virtually any type of monitoring or emulation task on any type of network from LAN to Wide Area Network (WAN) to the Internet, end-to-end," explains **Russell Cameron**, Truth Technology's CEO.

Based around a powerful kernel, the beauty of the toolset is that its functionality can be switched simply by changing the user interface. "By added a different Graphic User Interface (GUI), it becomes either a test product or an emulation product," Cameron says. "If it is operating in test mode, the GUI tells it to generate traffic and you chose what sort of profile you want. Or else you can capture traffic using the protocol stacks in the monitoring mode. You can even deploy it in front of a Web site and prioritise incoming traffic."



Up to 12 networks can be combined within the emulator, ranging from LANs to GPRS

While this is essential high-end tech for ISPs and network sellers, it's a little heavy duty for most game developers. But where Truth's technology scores highly is its ability to emulate the effect on an online application of changing network characteristics. Simply put, the emulation is application and not network-focused – just the thing for developers looking to minimise the imbalances of connection speed and platform performance. For example, the emulator can be used to test how much of a disadvantage a player using a 56K modem would experience if going head to head against a broadband-equipped opponent.

Up to 12 components can be modelled within the overall network emulation to build up the complete end-to-end picture. This is done either by entering the specific parameters which make up each network component, such as jitter, delay, error rate, buffering, and link speed, or by monitoring the network and saving its characteristics as a macro.

"Most game developers don't want to be bothered with the intricacies of the network," states Cameron. "They don't want to worry about the jitter or the packet loss. They want something they can test on."

With interest being expressed by some well-known developers and gaming networks, plus a joint marketing deal with Motorola for GPRS network emulation in place, for Truth it seems to be a case of right product, right time.





When emulating a network, users can enter the individual parameters that make up a network's characteristics or capture the network and save it as a macro

URL
www.truthtech.com
www.emu.truthtech.com
www.motorola.com/developers/wireless

Gunning for GPRS

With many developers considering the potential of mobile gaming, Truth's GPRS-only emulator will prove to be a popular starting point. Available as a $500 (£340) download from Motorola's wireless development Web site, the desktop emulator comes with four ten-minute-long macros, which provide a range of different network conditions: everything from passing between differently loaded cells to experiencing inference or losing signal.

"In the first instance it will be only emulate GPRS, but it will migrate to UTMS, EDGE and CDMA," explains Russell Cameron. "Over time we will also develop different macros for the different networks. For example we could capture the conditions of a network in Sweden or India and save them as specific macros."

'Forceful management

Fatal server crashes and lost or corrupted game data can be a thing of the past, promises Perforce



Perforce director of operations for northern Europe Dave Robertson

PERFORCE

URL
www.perforce.com

Supporting security

After cost, undoubtedly the biggest concern for developers buying tools and middleware is the level of support available. Perforce initially costs $600 (£415) per year per user, with support for year two priced at $120 (£83) per user per year. Support is something Dave Robertson is keen to evangelise, though. "Without hesitation the two things I would focus on are the quality of our product, and the exceptional quality of our technical support," he enthuses. "No one is in the company is paid a commission if there is a sale. Rather, we encourage users to download our software (there is a two-user version that can be used forever, for free, or for 45 days for as many users as required) and see for themselves what it can do. Invariably there is a call into support as part of this process, and we can usually convince prospective customers of the value of what we are offering."

Software Configuration Management (SCM) tools aren't the most fascinating area of the game industry, but with project management taking up an increasing amount of development time, they are becoming vital. Gone are the days when tiny teams spent a matter of weeks developing one specific title for one specific format. Now it's all cross-platform this and multi-language that, which means that the task of managing a game's assets, particularly those generated by artists, is ever-more problematic.

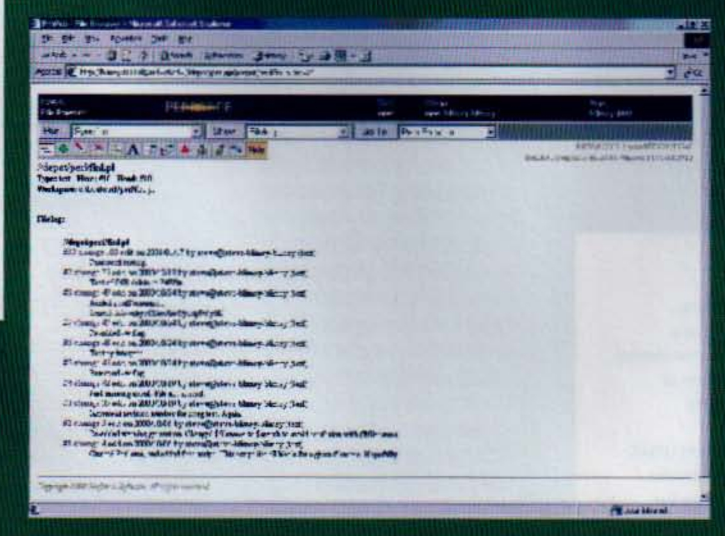
It's this situation that is driving developers' interest in such seemingly mundane packages as software management. Commonly used through the rest of the software industry, game developers have lagged behind, preferring instead to rely on blind faith and the organisational skills of the project leads.

"Most SCM tools are too focused on supporting rigid development processes," says Perforce's director of operations for Northern Europe, **Dave Robertson**, when asked why game developers have been so slow implementing these controls. Well established with commercial clients including NVidia and Silicon Graphics, Perforce is designed to support what Robertson calls 'a rapid design-build-test cycle'. "Many SCM tools add a significant burden of time and effort on developers to move software components through this lifecycle," he cautions. "This is a big turn-off for developers of products that needs to get to market quickly, such as games."

For Perforce, software configuration management tools are the acceptable face of modern game development

Essentially analogous to a software library that holds all the versions of all the files saved to it, Perforce's SCM offering enables a developer to recreate old game builds to help in code debugging and optimisation. It also ensures that the correct textures, models, and animations are in place within a build, while saving old versions if current work is lost or corrupted in any way.

"People use their regular editors and packages to create and modify their files," Robertson explains. "When the time comes to check in the files, the user switches to Perforce to complete the operation. During check-in, the files are transferred from the users' local disks into the main server. If there are no conflicts, there is no further work to do. If there is a conflict, for example two people have edited the same file, then the user must decide whether to overwrite their file with changes made elsewhere, or to merge their file with the other changes, or overwrite the changes with their own copy of the file." Although it may not set pulses racing, the promise of Perforce is certainly eye opening: faster-developed, better-engineered games.



Crossplatform development has increased the importance of SCM tools for producers

The Direct approach

New GeForce graphics technology mirrored by Nvidia's release of DirectX 8 SDK

NVidia European technical marketing manager Luciano Alibrandi







Halo and toon effects can be created using this technique for rendering silhouettes. One of the demos provided shows how to use vertex shaders to combine matrix palette skinning with per-pixel lighting using vertex shaders

Plenty of headlines have been generated by the unveiling of NVidia's GeForce3 card. Behind the scenes, though, the company has underlined its pre-eminent position in the evolution of 3D graphics with the release of its own development kit for DirectX 8.

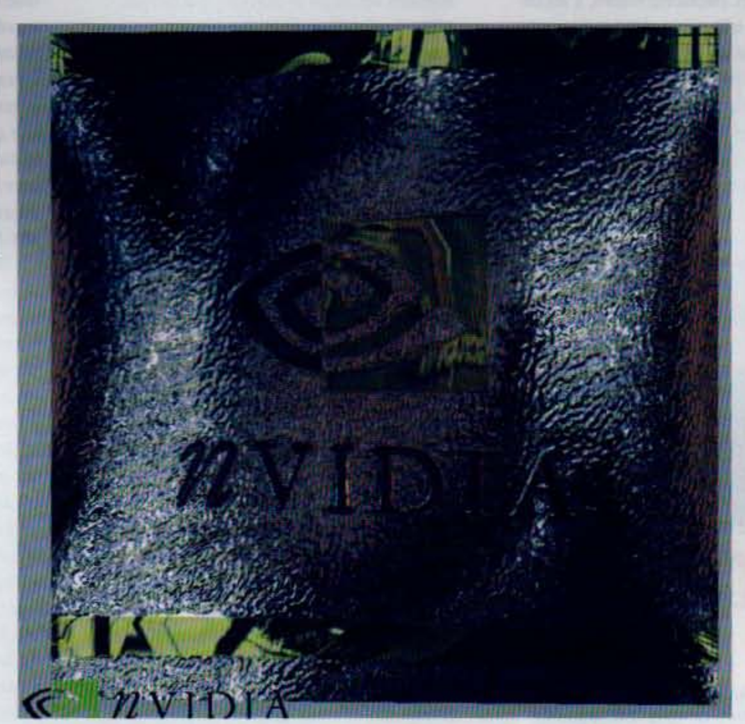
Although Microsoft oversees the DirectX brand, 3D chips companies such as NVidia, ATI, and – until its recent sell-off to NVidia – 3Dfx has driven the technology forward. But with the majority of DirectX 8's features being developed by NVidia in support of its hardware T&L cards and XBox's graphics processor, it has launched its own SDK for DirectX 8 so developers can make the most of GeForce3's features. In particular NVidia has focused on the so-called programmable pipeline, which provides developers with the freedom to choose how they handle geometry and rendering using bespoke vertex shaders and pixel shaders.

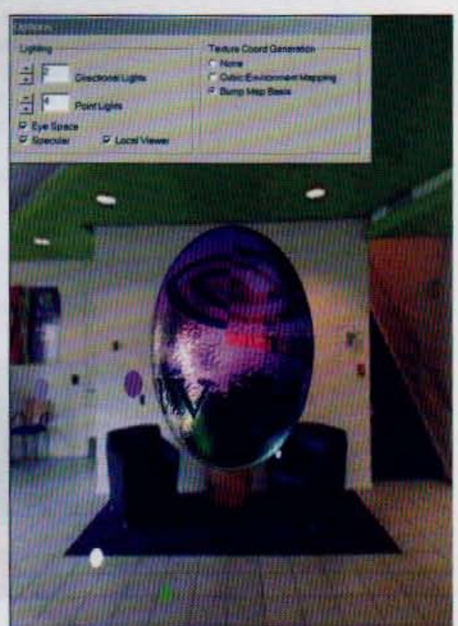
According to NVidia's European technical marketing manager, **Luciano Alibrandi**, one of the key elements in the development kit is the NVEffectsBrowser. "This is a tool NVidia has developed to make it easier for developers to enhance the quality of their games," he says. "There is a three-section window. In the left-hand window there's the name of the effect, in the right you get the effect running in realtime, and in the middle are the lines of code, so you can drop them into the game." The SDK will ship with more than 100 examples of transform, lighting, and effects routines. Other components include a unified driver architecture and more than 500Mb of source code, technical papers, and development tools.

NVidia has also incorporated its own take on 3Dfx's full-screen antialiasing (FSAA). "I wasn't a big fan of FSAA," confesses Alibrandi, himself one of the intellectual assets NVidia acquired from its takeover of 3Dfx. "But with the power increase of the GeForce3 and its new Lightspeed memory architecture, the performance is absolutely fantastic. You can run 1024x768, 32bit colour with antialiasing and it runs at 70fps. That's why we renamed FSAA, HRAA [High Resolution Anti-Aliasing]."

However, NVidia's announcement of GeForce3 for the Power Mac G4 means that it is supporting the card's featureset through OpenGL, too – DirectX being a *Windows*-only API. "We weren't showing just DX8 games at the European GeForce3 launch," confirms Alibrandi. "We were also using OpenGL, and we have written OpenGL extensions to take advantage of hardware features such as the pixel and vertex shaders."

With regard to the future of DirectX, Alibrandi is aware of the danger of it becoming an NVidia monopoly, particularly following the closure of Microsoft's European DirectX office. "We are glad there is competition, because if there is no competition, there is no evolution. That is why we want to see the likes of ATI and Matrox doing their own support," he says. As a former 3Dfx employee, Alibrandi doesn't need to be reminded about the risks of proprietary APIs. "I used to be fan of Glide [3Dfx's API]," he ends with a degree of regret.





One new tool in the DirectX 8 dev kit is the NVLink. All you have to do is select the number of lights of nex-gen modes and it can automatically create an optimised vertex shader

URL
www.nvidia.com/developer.nsf

What SIGGRAPH has in store

As graphics conference returns to LA, *3D World*'s Ben Vost looks forward to what it may offer





With its return to Los Angeles from New Orleans, chances are that SIGGRAPH will tempt out the hometown CG cognoscenti

The industry is currently in the throes of its annual fallow period between astounding upgrades to your favourite software as everyone waits for SIGGRAPH. Already the whispers are flying over what's going to be unveiled at this year's event – possibly the only one that serious 3D artists need attend every year. This year's SIGGRAPH will be back in its traditional home of Los Angeles after last year's sojourn in New Orleans. An LA SIGGRAPH is always better attended by the stars of CG simply because they are mostly based on the west coast of the States, and, even more specifically, located in and around LA. Before August arrives there's plenty of time for rumours to start flying about what will be new in next year's versions of the best 3D software, so the time has come to get the ball rolling with a few suppositions.

LightWave

Newtek's long-running saga of updating and improving its broadcast-friendly 3D package will have its new chapter this year at SIGGRAPH. *Version 7* is due to be launched there, even though it won't be ready until the end of the year. The company will also be launching *LightWave Express* at NAB next month. Replacing *Inspire*, it will be based on *LW 6* with a few of the major plug-ins removed, but without the restrictions on render size that *Inspire* had. It seems to be an only slightly cut-down *LightWave* meaning that the price will be higher than than for *Inspire*, but still in the £500-£600 region.

Max

Unlike last year's show, where most of the talk focused on the new release of *Character Studio* that had a crowd simulation, this year's event will almost certainly see a minor update to *Max 4*. Plug-in coders have been told that, unlike the fiasco that happened between *Max 2.5* and *Max 3*, updating their software for the fourth version of the game houses' favourite package should merely be a recompile with a few pointers changed. Even so, new plug-ins like Kelseus' Cloth, a replacement for the Reyes Infografica Cloth solver, are only going to be available for *Max 3* for the time being.



SIGGRAPH traditionally marks the end of a fallow period, when companies unveil their upgrades

HAM

Martin and Marshall are hard at work on *Hash Animation Master*'s ninth version, which is currently in beta. *Hash Animation Master 2001* promises to add even more tools for the character animator, but also remains resolutely both a NURBS-based modelling solution and low-cost package.

trueSpace

trueSpace 5 has just been launched to great acclaim, at least from *trueSpace* fans, who all clamoured for the changes that have been made. As an admittedly smaller package, *trueSpace* has never claimed the attention that bigger name software like Maya or Soft can, but proves it has some unique tricks like image-based lighting and Pentium 4 support up its sleeve with this new release. Like *Hash Animation Master*, this is also a solution for those on a budget.

Maya

Alias|Wavefront is planning to launch version 3.5 of the world's favourite 3D application for those not on a budget. A renewed concentration on this, its flagship product, after announcing that it would no longer work on its more peripheral compositing products like *Fusion* and *Composer*, will almost certainly mean more composition being integrated into the new version of the software.

XSI

Avid really needs to beef up its product line. Even to this point *XSI* still ships with 3.9.2 for those that don't wish to be tied down to *XSI*'s rudimentary modelling tools, even though its animation toolset is probably the best in the business right now. Expect version two of *XSI* to be launched at the show – this time complete.

Cinema 4D

Germany's answer to *LightWave* will hit version 7 at SIGGRAPH. The current version 6.1 has just been upgraded to 6.3, and Maxon has also launched a new stills-only version of *C4D* called *C4D Art*, which has every detail of *C4D 6XL*, except for anything to do with animation. Good for character study or box artwork in a production house, this version will retail at a significantly lower price than the full-blown version.

Although there aren't many details floating around about what will be included in these new releases, one thing is certain: now that photorealistic and cel-shaded rendering is commonplace, now that IK and FK are pedestrian, now that production workflow is something that all major packages can handle, the next acknowledged steps are games and the Web.

Max 4 has its Direct 3D interface display allowing a WYSIWYG view of models in action, and most packages can already or say they will shortly be able to export VRML, Cortona, VET, RealActor, Cult, Pulse or any number of other Web 3D formats. Whether people will want to invest in production-level tools to create 'compelling content' for their Web sites this year, everyone is gearing up to sell to them. The other external influence is Steve Jobs and Apple's laser-like concentration on 3D being the next market to conquer now that they've hit DV, DTP, and graphics in general. The only hurdles to this – being a single-buttoned mouse, poor 3D graphics, and, most importantly, a fairly unforgiving OS – should be vaulted with the release of OSX.

Based on the Mach kernal, this Unix-like multi-threaded multi-tasking operating system, combined with the friendly face of Apple, promises such 3D glories that seemingly overnight all the major 3D software companies have announced Mac OSX versions of their applications. Alias|Wavefront was the first off the blocks when Richard Kerris, chief *Maya* technologist, himself a confirmed Mac addict with six at home, proudly announced that the company was going to bring a version of *Maya* out for the platform last year. Combined with the announcement that NVidia's GeForce 3 will be available for the Mac before any other platform, the Mac needs re-evaluation as a serious contender to the cheap PC for a 3D platform.

URL
www.siggraph.org

Diary of a videogame

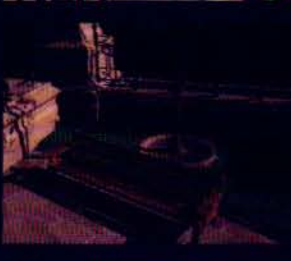
Elixir's team thinks about virtual thinking

Elixir diary, part 25
by designer Joe McDonaugh











While the *Republic* graphics engine has garnered attention and praise, the AI is also worthy of closer inspection

One of the most important milestones in a game's development is called 'first playable'. First playable means proof of concept – the technology works, the game design is coherent, and a realistic release date is within sight.

Eidos held an internal marketing day to present their forthcoming games to sales and marketing teams from around the world. This allows them to plan their marketing strategy for all forthcoming games. It also allows the developer to schedule in essential marketing materials such as demos, screenshots, and AVIs. This is particularly important for the US, where lead times on magazines are three months or longer. Ideally you want synchronised marketing and development schedules to avoid running adverts before the game is complete. This happens a lot – the game finally comes out and no one knows it's out because you've blown your marketing budget.

Many developers aren't interested in this sort of thing, but we bend over backwards to help, as these are the people who will sell your game. If they don't understand it or have little enthusiasm for it, you can't expect them to do a good job. We do everything in our power to help them, as our attitude is that our job isn't done until someone's walked out of the shop with our game.

As ever, Eidos was full of amazingly good-looking women, and we presented the game throughout the day, and people seemed pleased with what they saw.

We went down to Eidos a couple of days later for the milestone meeting, and it went very well for us. The experimental stuff, particularly the engine and the AI – the stuff people said we couldn't do – we've now done. Ian Livingstone, Eidos's chairman, wrote about the demo on his newly launched Web site: 'This week I saw the first playable version of *Republic*, and I was amazed by Elixir's achievement thus far. I sent my character to the town square to listen to an opposing faction's supporter giving his all on a soap box. His audience was enthusiastic. Action was necessary. After setting up a time to meet this supporter, I had to decide how to get him to change his allegiance. Argue with him, bribe him or give him a right good hiding? Now what would best suit my personality?'

While it has been our graphics engine that has attracted most attention to *Republic: The Revolution*, what we're trying to do with the artificial intelligence, in creating an entire country, is every bit as impressive as the engine. Over the last few months we've made excellent progress in this area. **Alex Whitaker** recently joined us from Psygnosis as a senior AI programmer. Here he discusses some of the challenges of designing the simulation for the game:

"For its first 30 years the pursuit of artificial intelligence promised much and offered little, but then exactly ten years ago, with a paper entitled 'Intelligence Without Reason', Rodney Brooks offered a different view of what it takes to make an artefact intelligent. Through Brooks' tenure at MIT he has built and refined an increasingly intelligent dynasty of robots using behavioural rather than deliberative architectures.

"Behavioural AI systems work from the bottom up – the agent perceives certain features of its environment and responds directly to them, and with careful design an intelligent behaviour emerges. Deliberative systems allow the agent to build an internal model of its environment, and use rules to extend that model and make assumptions based upon it. The big problem is that, in general, for deliberative systems computing power requirements are exponential, whereas for behavioural systems they are linear.

"Needless to say, for driving many thousands of agents exponential computing requirements are not attractive. One of a number of technologies we use to drive agent behaviour in *Republic: The Revolution* relies on the same augmented transition networks (ATN) on which Brooks bases his subsumption architecture. The ATN system that we use extends the simpler finite state architectures characterised by computer games such as *Half-Life*, and is far more concise.

> "While our graphics engine has attracted most attention, what we're trying to do with the AI, in creating an entire country, is every bit as impressive"

"The agent behaviour is held in a database that describes the relationships between what the agent sees (its percepts) and what it does (its effects). We have created an editor that allows a designer to manipulate that database, so now the task of creating all of the behaviours begins. This starts with networks describing the simplest level of behaviour – for example, how the agent will enter or leave a vehicle. We then build these into ever more complex networks – drive to location, go to work, etc. Finally we create the highest-level networks describing the complex actions that drive gameplay such as bribe official or call a strike.

"This family of algorithms have been shown to have very low processor overhead, but allow the description of very complex behaviours. Because the code driving the networks is isolated from the data describing the behaviour, the designers are able to realise their vision without constantly referring to the programmers, and the programmers are able to refine the engine without being constantly disturbed by the designers.

"Given the ever-increasing expectations of Joe Public, the ability to design convincing and realistic behaviour skills are going to become essential and I have no doubt that 'behavioural designer' is going to be appearing on the game CVs of the future."



The making of…

The Secret Of Monkey Island

Format: **PC/various**
Publisher: **LucasFilm Games**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **US**
Original release date: **1990**

Pirates, trials, puzzles you could actually solve, genuinely amusing gags: what didn't this point-'n'-click adventure have? **Edge** talks to the game's creator about humour, SCUMM, and George Lucas's love of baseball



The Secret Of Monkey Island is widely renowned as the finest point-'n'-click adventure ever created. While you could argue that *Sam And Max Hit The Road* is funnier, that *Day Of The Tentacle* is more aesthetically pleasing, or *The Fate Of Atlantis* more cleverly scripted, on aggregate *The Secret Of Monkey Island* has enough of every relevant desirable attribute to make it the most memorable and accomplished graphic adventure of its era.

Between 1987 and 1993 LucasFilm Games (known as LucasArts from 1991) dominated the genre to a remarkable extent; each release, including sequels, having a richly distinct style.

"I started at LucasFilm Limited doing ports to the Commodore 64," recalls *Monkey Island* creator **Ron Gilbert**. "When I finished my porting work, I did a game design with an artist at LFL – Gary Winnick – called *Maniac Mansion*. I had always loved adventure games, and was particularly fascinated with *Kings Quest*. I had a real love/hate relationship with that game. I loved the concept of an animated adventure, but was really frustrated by the puzzles, so I set out to make *Maniac Mansion*."

Maniac Mansion was revolutionary in a number of respects. Foremost amongst these was its use of the Gilbert-created SCUMM ('Script Creation Utility for *Maniac Mansion*') engine. This high-level programming language not just facilitated, but also simplified the process of directing bitmap characters and objects within

"I can't really say anything about SCUMM. If I do, George Lucas will come to my house and bust the place up with a baseball bat"

any given scene. In a progressively modified form, it has been used in every successive LucasArts adventure. Gilbert is reluctant to be drawn into a discussion on its intricacies, though: "I can't really say anything about SCUMM. If I do, George Lucas will come over to my house and bust the place up with a baseball bat." On the subject of *Maniac Mansion*'s other key innovations – the considered absence of manifold 'sudden' deaths, a genre idiosyncrasy since early text-based games, and the thoughtful omission of completely inexplicable puzzles – he's equally, though understandably, recalcitrant. "Oh, man," he groans. "There isn't enough room in the whole friggin' magazine to fully rant about death in adventure games..."

Zak McCracken And The Alien Mindbenders followed *Maniac Mansion*, and Gilbert began to consider another project. It's hard to imagine the embryonic *The Secret Of Monkey Island* surviving in many – if any – modern codeshops, but LucasFilm Games was enthusiastic from the start. "Back when I made the first *Monkey Island*," he remembers, "there was no 'management', so to speak. It was just a bunch of people that loved games. The head of the games division was Steve Arnold, and he was very good at letting creative people be creative people." Just as Gilbert began to work seriously on his embryonic design, however, his talents were appropriated for use elsewhere: LucasFilm wanted a game to tie in with the release of 'Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade'. *Monkey Island* was put on hold while he rushed to finish the first Indy adventure before its big-screen equivalent made its debut.

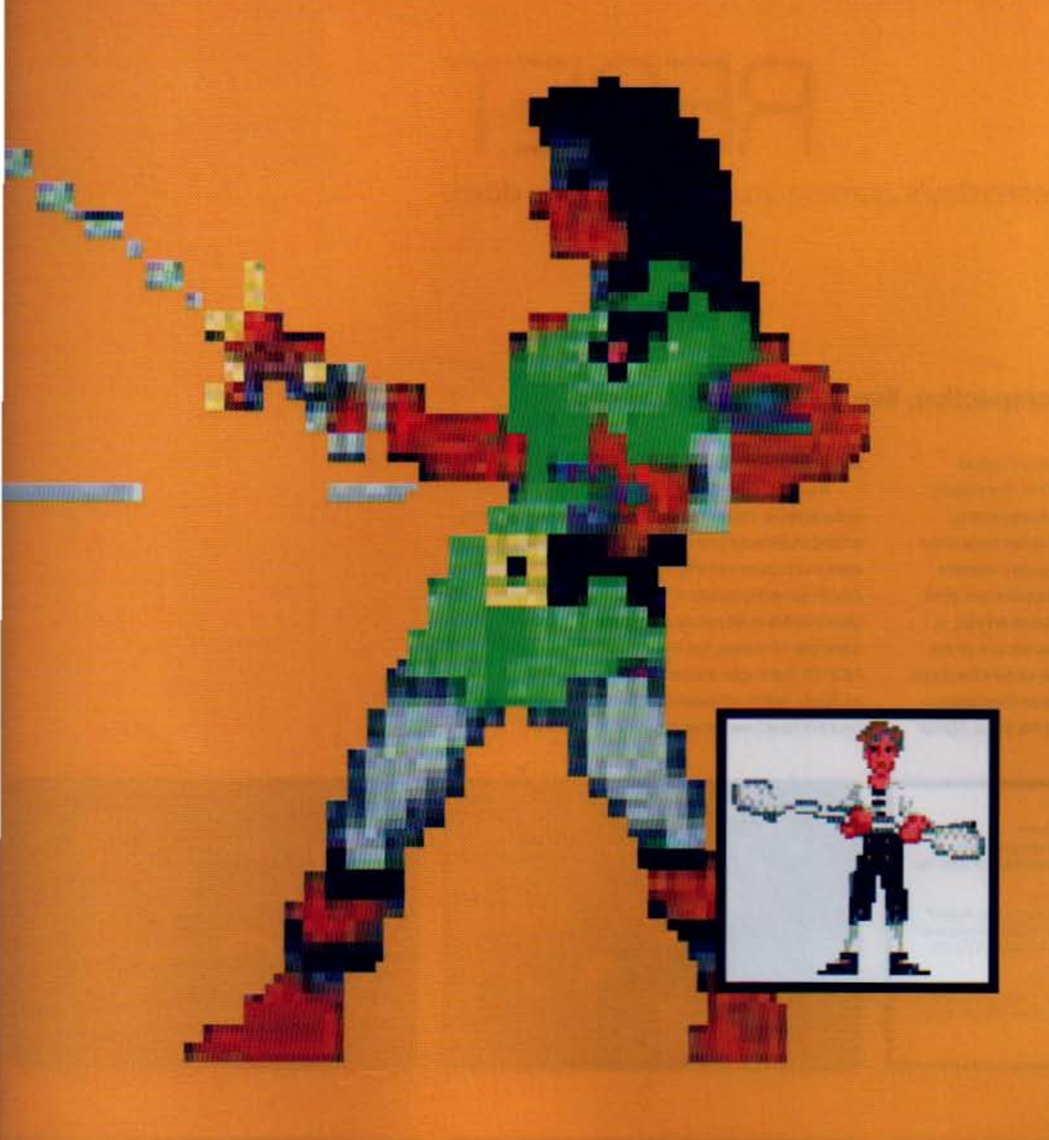
With the benefit of hindsight, this delay may have been highly fortuitous. With the additional experience of working on a high-profile movie tie-in, Gilbert began the careful planning for *Monkey Island*. He began by writing short stories, showing those of sufficiently high quality to his colleagues. An idea that aroused the curiosity of many was the introduction of ghosts in one tale; from this, the ghost pirate LeChuck was brought in to existence. Central character Guybrush took a little longer to evolve into his final form. "I didn't have a name for the main character when we started pre-production," says Gilbert. "The original design for *Monkey Island* had the central character suffering from amnesia, so he didn't know his name. I dropped this story element, but then had to come up with a name. Steve Purcell (the guy who invented Sam and Max) was drawing characters for me to look at. He was doing the editing in *DPaint*, and when you pick up an object, they call it a 'brush'. Since we didn't have a name, we were just calling him 'the guy'. Steve kept saving his brush files as guybrush.lbm. It kind of stuck."

One important aspect of *Monkey Island*'s appeal is the non-linear structure of its opening chapter, and Gilbert felt that wrestling with the complex logistics this introduced was worthwhile. The Three Trials plot device allowed him to offer a trio of separate tasks to the player. This meant that the entire game would not grind to a halt if the solution to a single puzzle was not immediately apparent. Having the SCUMM system in place also enabled him to fine tune areas of the game before committing to a final draft. Within three months of production commencing, Gilbert had a 'rough cut' of *Monkey Island*. Much of its art was an approximation of its final appearance, with no real animation, but it enabled him and co-writers Tim Schafer (later to create *Full Throttle* and *Grim Fandango*) and Dave Grossman (subsequently responsible for *Day Of The Tentacle*) to get a feel for their ideas in action.

Many games have their constituent elements bolted together for the first time at practically the end of the development process. Because *The Secret Of Monkey Island* was effectively 'playable' at such an early point, Gilbert was afforded the luxury of being able to polish the title's puzzle logic and plot from an early point – and, as aficionados with a game design background will assure you, this shines through in the game proper. Certain features did not bear the close scrutiny of play at this stage; elements were introduced and removed as Gilbert, Schafer, and Grossman tried to second guess the reactions of most players. *Monkey Island* fans may be interested to learn, for example, that Meathook initially required Guybrush to complete three tasks before agreeing to join the crew bound for *Monkey Island*, but the team worried that this had an adverse effect on the flow of that section – so two were removed. Conversely, the character of Herman



Despite his publicised contempt for old-school adventures with arbitrary 'deaths', Gilbert could not resist this gag – one that few players found at first



LucasFilm staff, were asked to help assemble thousands of boxed copies in order to ship on time. Many gamers in America, unbeknownst to them, may have a code protection wheel assembled by Grossman, or an instruction manual creased by Schafer. Despite such a hitch, the team was confident of its work's merits. "I was excited," confesses Gilbert. "I was very happy with the game. There was no publicly available Internet back in the olden days, but there was CompuServe. I remember going onto the gamer forum every day to see if anyone had played it."

Of course, *The Secret Of Monkey Island* was an enormous success on all fronts. It was followed in 1991 by a sequel, *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*. Larger and noticeably darker than its forebear – although not excessively so – it met with similar acclaim. At this point, and despite his intention to make a trilogy, Gilbert left LucasArts (as it had become) to found his own company. His only input into the last two *Monkey Island* games – both full of solid dialogue and immaculately produced, but lacking the je ne sais quoi of old – has been the inspiration inherent in his first two superb instalments. "I thought that *Monkey Island 3* was pretty good," offers Gilbert. "I liked the writing a lot. There were some story issues that I did not like. Elaine would never, ever, never, never, ever fall in love with Guybrush. I have not played *Monkey Island 4*."

So does he regret not working on a third episode, especially given the massive following that his first two games still command? "Yes, *Monkey Island* was planned as a trilogy," Gilbert laments. "It was very hard to leave after only two, but I really wanted to start my own company, Humongous Entertainment. I'm sorry to say that I can't divulge my story for the third *Monkey Island*. I have this fantasy that some day LucasArts will sell me *Monkey Island*, and I'll do the 'true' *Monkey Island 3*. People will play it and the Internet will be alive with buzz, saying things like: 'That was stupid!', and 'I like the other *Monkey Island 3* better'. Ah, you gotta love the Internet."

Toothrot was introduced when Gilbert realised that the Monkey Island chapter felt rather slow. Being almost entirely unpopulated on the surface, bar the cannibals to the north, Toothrot introduced much-needed character interaction.

The Secret Of Monkey Island's unique aesthetic, created by artists Steve Purcell and Steve Ferrari, represents a highly creative compromise. "We had huge limitations – 320x200, with 16 colours," explains Gilbert, "so we chose a style that played off of that. I based a lot of the look on the Disneyland ride Pirates Of The Caribbean. I wanted you to feel like you were in that world." The relative simplicity of *Monkey Island*'s appearance gives it, perversely, an integrity that its larger and more lavish later counterparts, including its first sequel, lack. It's a fault of many graphic adventures that there are interesting pieces of scenery that aren't interactive, even when plausibly relevant for the purposes of a puzzle; similarly, sweeping the screen for objects with the mouse pointer was never an issue with *Monkey Island*, because its blocky style made its items distinct.

Being a comedy game, *Monkey Island* enabled Gilbert and his team to offer offbeat, although eminently solvable, puzzles. "Comedy makes everything easier in adventure games," reveals Gilbert. "If you really look at adventure games, they are pretty stupid. Nothing really makes sense. Why is it that I need a pencil to solve a puzzle, and the only one in the world is back in New York City, huh? So, if you can make fun of situations like that, it makes your life easier. I really can't think of any good graphic adventures that were not comedies." One set piece in *The Secret Of Money Island*, in particular, is a great example of how enjoyable comedy-tinged puzzles can be. Guybrush is lashed to a heavy metal idol that he attempted to steal in a botched burglary and is thrown into the sea by LeChuck. Around him on the seabed, in an almost perfect circle, lie a multitude of cutting implements – all just out of his rope-restricted reach. The solution is worth a snigger – as is, for that matter, an incidental moment when two men appear on the docks directly above and discuss the disposal of a murder weapon. It's a knife. "I liked that puzzle," admits Gilbert. "The solution was simple, but I purposely put people in the wrong frame of mind, so many players didn't get it. As a designer, that is a very satisfying thing. Confusing people is not satisfying, because that's easy, but putting the answer right in front of them and then doing a little 'puzzle misdirection' is fun. It's like being a magician."

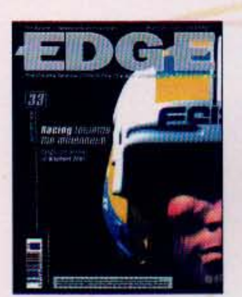
Akin to many notable pieces of videogame creativity, *Monkey Island* was late – and as a result members of the dev team, along with other

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 33, June 1996

'ECTS losing vital spring in its step?' asked the lead article in **E**33's news section. With one industry pundit politely terming the show "a bit disappointing," **Edge** wondered whether the 1996 European trade show could conceivably be the last. Jaded industry veterans have heard it many times since, of course, but two other items in the news section also carried future echoes. A Nintendo 32bit colour handheld seemed set to rock the portable world, and elsewhere a sidebar carried the shock news that Sega was to produce games for PlayStation – but finished with a caveat not to expect the *Virtua Fighter* series to turn up on a Sony machine. At least not yet.

The new NuMedia section promised to focus on a wider agenda, beginning with a review of, among others, a Sting multimedia project. Thankfully, that month's games were much more inspiring, with *Resident Evil* and *Tekken 2* both garnering excellent reviews. Prescreen-wise, a glance at *Mario 64* perhaps indictated **Edge** was having a few pre-10 nerves, but it was a two-page look at *NiGHTS* that began the section, and the first words on Sonic Team's oft-overlooked magical work couldn't have been more apt: 'History is cruel'.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"Funnily enough, I was down at the whip shop last week..." An audience with **Dave Perry** reveals the darker nature of Shiny life.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
'Does xenophobia count as good clean family fun then, Nolan?' **Edge** questions the motivation behind Nolan Bushell's attempts to wrestle videogame superiority from Japan on behalf of the US.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)
Resident Evil (PS; 9/10), *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* (Saturn; 7/10), *Tekken 2* (PS; 9/10), *Normality Inc.* (PC; 7/10), *Gun Griffon* (Saturn; 5/10)



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6

1. *NiGHTS* leads the Prescreen section, ahead of *Mario 64* 2. *Panzer Dragoon Zwei* – like swabbing gravy with a piece of bread, according to the review 3. A new section, and the beginning of a buzzword 4. Alias|Wavefront, expert renderer, receives a company focus 5. The ColecoVision: 'A system not to be forgotten' 6. GT's unassuming ECTS stand

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Argonaut producer **Caspar Field** remembers SNES *Super Mario Kart*





Field fell for Nintendo's racer while under the influence of lysergic acid diethylamide, officer

Christ. I'm torn – so much love, so many games, so few words. Is it *Speedball*, which forced the purchase of an Amiga? Or *Super Metroid*, one of the most beautiful of all game designs?

I'm skirting the issue, really, because more than any other title, *Super Mario Kart* didn't just rock my world, it became part of it. Actually, after an acid-fuelled eight-hour session, I think it altered my brain. But let's not get into that.

For me, *SMK* is the father of modern videogame racers. Its structure, how it unfurled to reveal a peacock's tail of dazzling gameplay – with the 100cc, 150cc, Star and Special modes fanning out – was brilliantly compelling. Yes, *F-Zero* paved the Mode 7 way, but by layering its character properties on top, Nintendo made *SMK* the seminal work.

I loved the balancing. If you were fast you won by a reasonable margin; but if you became a grandmaster, sliding through bends on a razor edge of control, weaving past opponents with subconcious precision, the game bowed to your skill and the pack was left far behind. The tracks were tighter than a gnat's chuff, the battle mode digital amphetamine. *SMK* was polished so hard it stands proud almost a decade on. Just don't mention the N64 version. Sob.



FAQ

Jeff Minter

Programmer

When not mounting a frenetic and relentless assault on *Tempest 3000*'s enemy vectors, which is startlingly at odds with an otherwise easy-going character, VM Labs' software engineer **Jeff Minter** is busy updating the PAL Nuon's VLM effects.

What was the first videogame you played?
The first videogame I ever played was definitely *Pong*. My brother had one of the really early home *Pong* units, and I remember being completely jealous of him. First coin-op, I suppose, was probably *Breakout* – when I was in a wine bar drinking illegally underage with my brothers one Christmas.

What was the first console or computer you actually owned?
The first console that I owned was a weird thing called the Teleng-Rowtron 2000, or something like that. It was cartridge programmable, but it was one of these things where the chip was a dedicated game processor, so it wasn't like changing a ROM or something, you just changed over the actual dedicated chip. The first computer I ever owned was a ZX80.

What was the first thing you ever created?
The first bit of programming I ever did was a biorhythm program on the Commodore 10, which I converted from my brother's Texas Instruments calculator. It worked, but I remember him pointing out later that it was completely wrong.

"I'm not really enamoured with programming by committee. You see credits for games now and there are about 40 bloody people on there"

What was your first job in the industry, and what did you design?
I suppose I did some freelance ZX80 programming for an outlet called DK'Tronics – sold them a few games. I also did some work designing a character generator. The first thing I ever designed game-wise would probably be a twoplayer battle game on the Commodore 10.

What's your favourite game ever?
Oh, that's quite a tough one. I'm very torn between the classics, the Williams classics – stuff like *Robotron* and *Defender* – not a lot can touch them in terms of pure gameplay. But then again, in terms of elegance of programming in creating a wonderful game in a small amount of memory that is deeply absorbing… I mean, *Star Raiders* on the 8bit Atari, there's not a lot that can touch that.

What was the last game you played?
The last game I played was *SSX*.

How many hours a week do you play videogames?
Well, if I'm working on a game, then all the bloody time. For leisure I probably play an hour or two a day – I'm not totally fanatical about it. Every now and again I get some mates round for a bit of a session.

Do you still visit arcades, and which games do you look for?
I don't as much as I used to, but then I think it's just because the arcade games are so generic. I'll go in and have a look at what the current state of the art of driving games and fighting games is, but that's all you really find in arcades. Unless you find an arcade that's got some classic old coin-ops – like a working *Defender* or *Tempest*. I'll play that until the cows come home.

Which game would you most have liked to have worked on?
There are designs I wish I'd come up with. I mean, everybody wishes they'd come up with *Tetris*, obviously, because it's just such a perfect design – that is the perfect videogame. But I would have liked to have worked on the original *Defender* or *Robotron* with Eugene Jarvis. Or the original *Tempest*.

What new developments would you like to see in videogaming?
I'd like to see people getting into using different kinds of rendering techniques. What I tried to do with *Tempest* [*3000*] was break away from everything I've done, purely because polygons just go to higher and higher resolutions of polygons. It's about the actual kit and exploring new kinds of graphics techniques using non-polygonal shapes. A lot of games tend to look samey because people use the same techniques from all the [software] libraries in all the different systems. That's why I think PlayStation2 games



don't look that much better than their Dreamcast equivalent, because the libraries have got the same functions and nobody has really attempted to do anything new with it – they're just using what's in the library.

What annoys you most about the industry?
People are too reliant now on a standard set of techniques. There are very few programmers these days who will actually get down and learn how the machine works and get the most out of it. I mean, they're all there in the C libraries without doing any real hard work of their own.

What's the greatest thing about working in videogames?
The unbridled creativity of it. Just being able to sit there and work on exactly the kind of stuff that you want to work on, that you really enjoy. That's another thing which I appreciate working on my own – people just let me go away and get on with it, I don't have to liaise with loads of people. I'm not really that enamoured with this programming by committee that you get. You see the credits for games these days and there are about 40 bloody people on there.

Whose work do you most admire?
Eugene Jarvis, Alexei Pajitnov – at least for *Tetris*, but I don't think he's really equalled *Tetris* since. Doug Neubauer, the guy who designed *Star Raiders* on the 8bit Atari, Dave Theurer, obviously Shigeru Miyamoto. They're probably my current heroes in the biz – in or out of the biz, that is, as not all of them are still in.

inbox

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I think the entire game industry is getting carried away with next-generation issues, which I feel are growing on the back of false hopes. Personally, I feel that what the PlayStation did for the industry was a good thing, but it needs to be realised that although the PlayStation currently holds the biggest market share, those punters are also the most fickle. Yeah, games are hip and trendy, but for how long? I know many PlayStation owners who are caught up in the whole fashion thing – it's currently cool to get home from the pub, flick the switch to load their latest 'pirated game', and enjoy it for all of five minutes before passing out.

I can't see the 'hip and trendy' image extending to the next generation of consoles, other than buying them to play DVDs (obviously a good marketing ploy, but a shortsighted one). The market will start to shrink, the development costs are already known to be much higher, and the end result will be very serious to us all. The extra power from the consoles is also forcing people to overlook what makes a good game. Look at the football games coming out – they all look and play the same way. The use of 3D was excellent with the last consoles, but now it is time for a change.

Here's a thought: imagine how *Sensible Soccer* could play and look on a new console. Probably no better than on the Amiga, but it would be a welcome relief to play something quick and fun with the bonus of costing next to nothing to produce.

On a positive note, I am very pleased to see that Nintendo recognises (through making very big mistakes of its own) that there is a need for making a machine easy to work with and focusing on it being a games machine. I honestly feel the company has the brightest future because of its previous bad experiences. Nintendo has almost stuck two fingers up to the fashion conscious by refusing to have DVD movie playback, and implementing a good anti-piracy device. These features will let it know that when a GameCube is purchased, it is by a serious gamer. Surely the industry will not survive without it.

Philip Bridge, via email

The latest iteration of PS2 *ISS* certainly doesn't play the same as the competition, but you're certainly correct about videogames no longer being fashionable. Like flares, though, they'll come back in again.

If we are to learn the lessons of history, then the best thing that can happen to the games industry today is that it goes through another crash similar to the one that crushed Atari in the early 1980s. I don't know about **Edge** but I am looking forward to the day the industry collapses and self destructs allowing it to purge itself of all the third-rate, substandard games companies who think they know how to create videogames.

Nintendo is the only company, in my opinion, which understands how the industry works. It was Nintendo, who, after the crash of the '80s, took hold of the game industry and didn't let go until ten years later. Sony then came along and allowed its thirdparty publishers to flood the market with complete dross.

Okay, there were a few exceptions along the way, but that's the law of averages for you. Taking a look at PS2 software at the moment, it seems Sony has learned nothing. The quality of games on the PS2 at the minute is absolutely scandalous, and I look forward to the day when Nintendo takes over again with the GameCube and the walls finally come crashing in on Sony's PS2. If Sony can become market leader with the quality of software on the PS2, then there really is no hope.

Thurston Lowe, via email

The really interesting point about Nintendo is that it is the company that cares least about competing in hardware wars. Maybe there's a lesson there.

I think your article 'All too real?' [**E**96] perfectly illustrates how the game industry is becoming more and more hostile towards animators. Braben's quote, "This takes far less animator time, and it allows the animators to spend their time on creating secondary animations for things like clothing and hair," is a good example of the lack of understanding for animation displayed by programmers.

I challenge you to show me an animator who chose the profession in order to animate clothing and hair – two things that can be solved with dynamics-based animation. I completely acknowledge that animation by its nature is a time-consuming procedure, and there always exists the need for meeting deadlines, but when the solutions alienate part of the creative team I think this is destructive.

On a more positive note I applaud Toby Gard's comments regarding a time and a place for motion capture, and the fact that there's nothing comparable to traditional animation to convey story and mood in a medium that demands exaggeration and melodrama.

After two years out of the game industry I was beginning to think – with the dawn of PS2, GameCube, etc – that it might be time to look at getting back into it, but after Braben's comments I reckon I'll get my pencils out again.

Adam Coglan, via email

Right now, technology is an enabler: it is bringing



Adam Coglan laments the effects David Braben's animation solutions (as seen in *Dog's Tale*) have on traditional animators like himself



James praises XBox, as it features 'all the elements of a good PC system, namely: flexibility and no bottlenecks'. And no crashes, either, presumably

videogame imagery closer to real-life imagery. As the gap closes further, gaming's own expressionism should eventually blossom. Give it some more years and then put the pencils back in the box.

Well, give credit where credit is due. **Edge** 95 gave the most balanced and well-written piece on Sega's problems in the gaming press. Certainly better than the crap I read in the broadsheets.

Everyone and anyone involved in games, be they consumers or makers, had their own ideas on what Sega should and shouldn't have done with Dreamcast. Some said advertise more aggressively on TV, some said get demo pods everywhere, some said release at a low price, and some said don't release it at all. What was emphatically agreed by all concerned, though, as the most important point for Dreamcast's success or failure, was the quantity of quality original games released.

So what went wrong? The price point was classed as aggressive, demo pods were everywhere. It's interesting, especially in terms of advertising and game quality; a friend who works in marketing made this point to me. Do you think the PS2 would have sold out across the world if it had not one piece of software available at launch? My answer was yes, it would have still sold out – and on that point most people agree. And in my view this is where Sega fell.

They failed to realise that games, great or otherwise, do not sell consoles any more. Sega did release great games, but still the machine didn't sell in numbers to make it viable. Sega didn't advertise on TV in the same volumes as Sony will but would it have made a jot of difference? I don't think so.

At least as Sega's hardware doors shut for the last time, much bigger doors open – as **Edge** correctly points out. Let's hope gamers still want Sega games because they weren't willing to buy a Dreamcast to play them.

John Bright, via email

One thing is clear: you're much more likely to get someone to buy your videogame system if you give them the opportunity to sample its capabilities rather than merely showing them your logo on the chests of a bunch of underachieving footballers.

In reply to Alex Winn in **E**95: firstly, the CPU on the PS2 is a custom chip that is only generally related to the Apple Mac's G4. Judging by my company's IBM RS6000, a RISC-style chip running at only 294MHz is about evens with the standard Intel at 733MHz.

However, this isn't really the issue. PS2 may have the snazziest CPU in the box, but what does that matter? You only have to look at the quality of the games coming out for the PS2 to realise that it is a very difficult machine to program for. **Edge** warned of the 'first generation' of PS2 games being rubbish, and thus it has become so. The XBox, on the other hand, has been designed based on PC specifications. Its design has one main thought in mind: make it easy to program. It has a very clean and open architecture with a spec sheet that can only be the result of long research by Microsoft. On paper it reads like a programmer's 'greatest wish' list. The design has all the elements of a good PC system, namely: flexibility and no bottlenecks. Add the fact that its components are widely available and cheap to buy, and the so-called 'Power of PlayStation' seems to be even more of a marketing gimmick. As will the PS2's market lead once the XBox is released.

Admittedly, the XBox may have problems to come out of the woodwork yet, but, Microsoft's involvement aside, the system is definitely looking to be my next console choice. As for your claim of owning a 'supercomputer', I'm sorry – the only true and proven game machine that can claim that title is the Game Boy.

James, via email

I can't hold off for any longer. This regular acknowledgement of Treasure that I have been reading in **Edge** has compelled me to write for the first time. The remarks of praise that you bestow on the toweringly brilliant developer fill me with a kind of joy that has recently only been evoked by learning of Sega's announcement, fast-forwarding two years into the future, and seeing Sonic Team, AM2 et al etched on even the least fussiest mainstream gamers eyeballs.

There are, to understate wildly, some top-notch Treasure-produced Mega Drive games that never appeared to arouse any attention at the time of their release – *Alien Soldier* being one of the most lavish and intense platform-shooters imaginable, appropriately impenetrable by the non-hardcore majority. *Dynamite Headdy* is saturated with acid-fried imagination while still effortlessly tough, rewarding and unpredictable. Like many Treasure games, it prides itself on booting the rules all the way to Mars. I would love to know the story behind *Light Crusader*, the unique isometric hack'n'slash-adventure/puzzler that takes the *Gunstar Heroes* weapon options a few generations further and re-brands them as Magic. This one is truly anomalous-a hack'n'slash title masquerading as an RPG. *Radiant Silvergun* may justifiably be the most famous of Treasure's 32bit titles but it's a damn shame that it overshadowed the freakishly original

'PS2 may have the snazziest CPU, but what does that matter? You only have to look at game quality to realise that it is a very difficult machine to program'



Timo Paul has dumped his Dreamcast and PS2 in order to remember how gaming used to be, thanks to the likes of NEC's little wonder

cartoon blaster *Silhouette Mirage*, which, correct me if I'm wrong, is a title **Edge** never covered, despite later being ported to the PS. I hope that a Treasure representative also confirms reports that the finest games in their respective franchises, *Contra IV* and *Super Castlevania IV* were also their handiwork (engrossing though PlayStation *Symphony of the Night* is, we all know that it's more *Metroid* than *Castlevania*).

Hassan Sajid, via email

Edge hopes this month's feature goes some way towards giving you an insight into the quirky codeshop. (Incidentally, Saturn *Silhouette Mirage* was reviewed in **E**53, scoring six out of ten.)

Today's trivial fulmination is directed at games companies everywhere. Over and over again the console manufacturers trumpet the audio-visual prowess of their wares. Jolly good. That's what we want. But the software invariably lacks two important ingredients:

1. Sound. Where's Dolby Digital? Where even is Dolby Surround? Maybe one game in a hundred supports Dolby Surround yet analogue TV and the humble VHS standard have sported it for years.

2. Widescreen. This is the picture format of choice and is likely to remain that way. Again, maybe one game in a hundred offers a widescreen (16:9) option. It is a dismal state of affairs to have to switch from the Widescreen and Dolby (oops, almost wrote dobly) delights of DVD to the comparatively low-tech of a videogame and this is a situation liable to become all the more aggravating with hybrid game/DVD devices like the PS2 and XBox.

Videogames aspire to the dramatic intensity of movies yet lack the audio-visual tools to the deliver the experience. So, come on, developers, stop moaning about fill-rates and get yourselves up to date with the basics.

Hmph.

Jake, via email

Jake, you're just never happy, are you?

Why are many of your readers continually wondering about the future of videogaming? Why can't they all relax and let the industry unfold through the natural course of time? It seems pointless to me to be concerned about that which you do not know – the future. Do you people believe you will change anything by having these concerns? So, everybody, chill out, and as Gregg Barnett said in **E**95, 'just let the monkey dance'.

Alex Westworth, via email

Not *everyone's* obsessed with the future…

I had a real slap in the face a few days ago. I have been reading about and then playing next-generation games and then suddenly I had an urge to buy a PC Engine, Mega Drive and Super Famicom, and I am amazed at how much I had forgotten what it felt like to play videogames. Not for seven years have I had this much fun again, I don't know what it is – maybe the charm of the detailed 2D sprites and backgrounds – but I have now gotten rid of all my latest games machines – PS2, Dreamcast, N64, Saturn and Playstation – and am just playing old-school titles.

I'm not sure what I'm really trying to say here, but the magic is gone from these latest consoles and games. I don't know what needs to be done, but there is something which is missing, and I believe the answer can be found in the past.

Timo Paul, via email

Mmm… parallax scrolling, isn't it? Marvellous.

'Where's Dolby Digital? Where even is Dolby Surround? Maybe one game in a hundred supports it yet analogue TV and the humble VHS standard have supported it for years'

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

Gunstar_Red

I always thought it would be a cool idea to go on a gaming road trip across America, stopping off at arcades on the way and heading as your final destination to the Nevada desert where it is rumoured that Atari buried the *ET* game cartridges when they realised they had made more copies of the game than there were consoles in existence!

There's a film in there somewhere…

welsh

I prefer a five-star scoring system as opposed to ten. This way, you get one or two five-star games a month as opposed to one perfect ten every year or so. And there's less pedestal-style elitism involved. Maybe. ;)

However, when I look at the three games that **Edge** has rated a perfect ten, and considering **Edge**'s readership and aims, I reckon this distinction is actually necessary over the simplified five-star system.

Ad

The real problem, one presumes, are the readers. The lazy option is to go braindead and go game A = 8/10 and game B = 9/10, therefore I'll buy game A over game B. I'm not going to bother insulting your intelligence by explaining why that is a ridiculous situation.

BOSSofRAP

Edge???

What happen with you [sic]???

Do you know how play Pcgames [sic]???

Have you got idea about anything [sic]?

Severance is a very good game, that you shouldn't despreciate [sic].

I think that your magazine is a shit [sic].



Next month

Edge hails the victors in the last 12 months of e-entertainment





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